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INDIAN JOE, THE GUIDE;

OR,

THE WHITE SPIRIT OF THE HILLS

A SEQUEL TO "BEN, THE TRAPPER."

BY MAJ. LEWIS W. CARSON.

NEW YORK:
BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
98 WILLIAM STREET.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1871, by
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INDIAN JOE, THE GUIDE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY.

“WAKE up, man! The bears will be after you before you know it.”

The speaker was stooping by the side of a rapid stream, shaking by the shoulder a man who lay there asleep. The person who spoke was a young fellow in a hunting garb, with a rifle in his hand and a knife in his belt. His frame was strong and well made, his face manly, and his general appearance prepossessing. The man at his feet, who did not wake even when the hand was laid upon his shoulder, was one of whose nationality there could be no doubt. He was a Dutchman, having the marked characteristics of his people. He had a rather good-looking, indolent face, and, as his eyes at last opened lazily, as the other shook him roughly, considerable cunning was displayed in their depths.

“Vy you shakes me, den?” demanded the sleeper, in an injured tone. “I nefer done nottings mit you.”

“Wake up, then.”

“Vake oop! vake oop! Vy shall I vake oop unless I wants to? Now, see here: you coes away now—right now, vile I dalks mit you. Shpose you no go away yoos. now, I vill get oop unt preak your het mit mine goon.”

“Oh no,” said the young hunter, laughing. “I don’t want to quarrel. But you are not safe here. I should really dislike very much to see a nice, good-looking fellow like you, gobbled by a grizzly bear. Don’t take any chances on sleeping out in this way, without a guard.”

“A crizzly pear! Vat is dat?” demanded the Dutchman.

“That is one of the most savage animals on the face of the earth,” was the reply. “The strength of a man is nothing when once he falls into his hug. Strong! That is not the word. Nothing can describe his strength and ferocity.”

"I dinks I don't vant nottings to do mit crizzly pears," said the Dutchman, rising. "Vell, who are you, anyvay?"

"My name is Daniel Crowley," replied the young man.

"Vat you do?"

"I am out on a hunt in company with a party of trappers and guides. Will you join us?"

"Vell, I don't care. I cooms away from St. Shoseph, in Missouri, pecause efery von is so particular off a man don't bay somet'ings mit de government efery dimes he sells a class of lager."

"Then it appears that matters not unconnected with the excise question sent you out on the plains."

"Yaw; I vas mat mit eferypoty, unt so I gets my gun unt dinks I vill co mit Californy. Vas it a goot vay off, you dinks?"

"A good way! I should think so: a trail a thousand miles long, through the desert and prairie, haunted by Indians who do not know what mercy means. What is your name?"

"Yost Hoppen."

"A good handle, that. But come with me. You are well armed, and a few weeks' hunting and fishing will do you good. And, when we go back to St. Louis, you can return to St. Joseph, and sell beer with more regard to the excise law."

"Yaw," said Yost. "But, shoost look at dis: ven a man drinks lager peer he drinks him for his own bleasure, eh?"

"Certainly."

"Vell den: vat bleasure is dere in drinking peer ven you can't drink it unless some Common Council or udder say you may? Gootness cracious! it makes me so mat ash nefer vas, somedimes, ven I dinks how I've been dreated."

"Never mind that now, Hoppen. Out here you can drink little except the pure spring-water, such as you rarely get in smoky and dusty cities. Beer, after all, does not satisfy thirst as good cool water does."

"Vater!" said the other, in a tone of intense disgust. "Yankees drink vater, unt don't care for peer?"

"A great many of them don't," replied Daniel.

"Den a creat many off dem are vools!" snorted the Dutchman. "Vat I not likes coot peer, vat foams from a panel

like snow, unt runs down the throat like oil, so creazy unt coot? Vy, I nefer sees how a man can lif mitout peer. I don't know how I does mitout it here."

"Now, I want to ask you a question, sir. Some people pretend to say that a man can't get drunk on lager beer. I never drank any, so—"

"Goot Lort!" ejaculated Yost.

"What is the matter?" said Crowley.

"Nefer trink any lager peer?" cried Yost.

"No."

"Nefer in all your life?"

"Not a glass."

"Den I vonders ash you pe not deat; now vile I dalka mit you. Nefer trinks any lager peer in all his life! Gootness cracious! dat ish so funny."

"I was going to ask you a question," said Crowley. "There are those who say that people can not get drunk on the stuff they call lager beer; others say you can. What is your opinion?"

"Vat you call him?—shtuff?"

"I beg pardon—the drink called lager."

"I dells you vat I dinks. Dere ish no delling off a man could not drown himself mit lager, yoost de same ash he might do mit vater. Now den, lager ish not made to swim in. Vater ish petter vor dat. Lager ish made to *trink*. Off a man sits town, unt trinks his deux or tri-dozen classes off lager, it vill not hurt him. I nefer trinks more ash vorty mugs mineself."

"Is that all?" said Daniel, laughing.

"Dat ish not mooch. A man nefer ought to make a hog off himself."

"That is true," said Daniel, repressing a strong inclination to laugh. "Come along. We may as well go to camp."

Yost shouldered the rifle which had lain at his feet during the conversation, and followed the speaker.

The stream on which they stood ran through a beautiful prairie-land, spread out before them like a great map. In the distance, the lofty peaks of the mountains could be seen. The prairie, in the hunting season, is one of the most remarkable sights ever seen by mortal eyes. Daniel Crowley was a

lover of nature. His dark eyes rested approvingly upon the beautiful landscape, and he drew a long sigh of pleasure, and turned to his Dutch friend for sympathy. As he did so, he laughed outright at the expression of his face. He had been studying for some time on the wonder of a man who had lived to the age of twenty-five, and had never tasted the delectable drink called lager.

"Nefer trinks lager peer in his life! Goot cracious, vat a man!"

Crowley had his laugh out and then walked slowly away up the stream. He had not gone very far from camp, and in fifteen minutes they entered it together. There were four men in all. Two of them were the ordinary trappers of the northwest, clad in buckskins and moccasins. Another was a half-breed, a well-known guide over the hunting-grounds west of the Mississippi. A tall, nobly-formed man, with a keen, restless glance, showing the Indian blood in the elasticity and grace of every motion and in his swarthy skin. He wore the ordinary dress of a hunter and guide. Near him, whittling at a small piece of wood which lay in the hollow of his hand, and whistling in a loud key, sat an individual who was a character in his way. A sandy-haired, lank, lean-visaged fellow, in a greasy suit of buckskin, "tattered and torn," like the man in the old melody. He had a sharp, inquisitive eye, and a face nearly as dark as that of the half-breed, from constant exposure to the wind and sun of every locality. He cast a droll look at the Dutchman as he came up.

"What hev ye got thar, Dan?" demanded the greasy man. "I'll bet every cussed pelt I git this season he's a Dutchman."

"Keep quiet, Jeff Rooter," said Dan. "Don't meddle with my protégé."

"Yer—which?" yelled Jeff. "Oh, good gracious! Git me an ear-trumpet, so thet I kin catch the sound of thet ar' word. Proto--ha! ha! ha! Oh, Dan, ye'll be the death of me."

"I'll give it to you right under the ear if you don't keep quiet. This man is going to join us. Use him well."

"Wait a minit, mister city man," said Jeff, suddenly assuming an expression of dignified anger. "What mout thet last remark of yours signified? Say it ag'in, an' say it slow."

Didn't I hear some remark 'bout givin' it to some one under the ear?"

"I think you did," said Dan. "This man is under my protection, and he shall not be troubled."

"That's a big word. Which ear mout ye prefer, Mister Crowley?"

"Don't bother me, Jeff. You can't quarrel with me, if you keep your own side of the fence. But, if you get over on mine, it might make a row. Now be civil. Don't mix yourself in with this man. I want him well used."

"Whose a-hurtin' of him; say?"

"Nobody," replied Dan. "And I propose to see that nobody does."

"Oh. Yer a sort o' gardeen of his'n. Now look hyar. I ain't a quarrelsome man, I a'n't. But I kin go through any man, big or lettle, old or young, the younger an' spryer the better I like it, thet goes to put on style over me. Yes sirree. I ain't nothin' but a lettle cuss, but thet thing I kin do. Which way will ye hev it? Nip an' tuck, square hold, side hold, or with bare fists? Any way you like. So's yer suited, I ain't partic'lar."

"A truce, Jeff. You and I have no right to quarrel."

"Then let Dutchy take his own part," grumbled Jeff.

"Vat you mean by dat?" said Yost, who had been measuring him with his eye for some time. "Vhat you want mit me?"

"For heaven's sake don't talk to him now, Yost," said Dan. "Keep quiet."

"Let me spoke a few dimes mit him," said the Dutchman, quietly. "He spoke at me good many dimes, unt I no says nottings. I'm not afraid mit him. He dalks too much mit his mout'."

"Keep back, every man of ye, while I thrash the ground with a Dutchman. Git out of the way, 'cause I don't want to spatter his blood an' bones an' brains all over yer good close. Now, Dutchy, hadn't ye better say yer pra'rs?"

"Vat for?" said Yost, who did not seem in the least frightened. "I nefer says my brayers mit te daytime. Vat ye goin' to do?"

"I'm goin' to wipe the ground with yer karkidge."

"Vat for?" asked the Teuton, in the same tone, his arms swinging lazily by his side. "Vat I done mit you?"

"You've got to be 'nitiated," replied Jeff. "I'm the man to do it. Once pay yer entrance an' it's all right. But, the time has come. Git ready. I'm goin' to wrastle ye down."

Jeff rushed forward and fastened on the Dutchman by the shoulder and elbow. Yost never made a struggle, but stood like a rock, smiling calmly at the efforts to overthrow him on the part of the greasy hunter. Jeff got very red in the face.

"I'll wrastle ye down ef I die," he panted.

"Off you do, unt I find it ous, I vill t'row you over der moon," said Yost. Jeff Rooter tugged and strained, without any perceptible effect on the equilibrium of the Dutchman.

"Go away," said the latter, getting weary of the sport. "You can't do nottings mit me. Dake away your hands."

"I'm goin' to throw ye, anyhow," said Jeff, continuing his struggles.

"I dells you vonce more, go away, ven I dells you."

"I won't."

Yost put out his long arms and grasped the speaker by the shoulders. One effort of his powerful muscles, and the feet of Jeff flew into the air and his body was deposited on the greensward ten feet away. He was on his feet in a moment and grappled his antagonist around the waist. The first throw had been such a surprise to him that he did not have time to put forth the skill he really possessed in wrestling. He was now on his guard and had his favorite hold. The left arm of Yost was thrown about his neck and his right hand grasped his wrist in an iron clasp. For five minutes they danced up and down upon the turf, and then, to the surprise and joy of every one, the heels of Jeff Rooter suddenly flew into the air, as he went over the hip of the Dutchman. Derisive yells greeted the fallen hero, as he rose slowly from the grass.

CHAPTER II.

THE GREAT AMERICAN PARTRIDGE.

JERRY was at first inclined to be angry. But, at the bottom of his bravado, there was a real admiration for a spirited act, and, before the laughter had subsided, he extended his hand and shook that of the Dutchman warmly.

"That's right, old man," he said. "I like a man with pluck, anyhow. Ye throwed me, fir' an' squar'. I don't say nothin' ag'in' it. Let's be friends."

"Sweet ash you like," said Yost, returning the cordial pressure. "I not r like to quarrel mit no mans. You pees very strong mit your arms. Von dimes I dinks I c'd throw you, mit another dimes I dinks you c'd throw me. Vat you do ous here anyvay?"

"We ar' on a hunt," said Jeff. "That young chap come out along er us after deer, grizzly an' beaver. I've told him deer ain't much safety hyer, 'cause the red di'gers is thick ez dips on spilled bacon. Howsomever, ef he ain't afraid, I ain't got no call to be, soin' it's the life I lead every year. Much of a shot, you?"

"I pees a Tom-hawke," said Yost, who did not quite understand him, or else, with the sly humor peculiar to him, was desirous of puzzling his new friend.

"Oh, shut up. I mean, can you fire a rifle?" said Roster.

"I vives mine gun deak er three times. I pees 'rail mit virearms," said Yost, with a sly look.

"Kin ye hit any thing with a shooting-iron? You heary a deer's foot er an' ef ye kin't shoot, it's a pity to hev it throwed away. Let's try a shot."

"I dinks I can not hit any thing with I shoots," said the Dutchman. "Is your gun a small kirk? Don't I pees kirk?"

"Don't be afraid. Let me load it for ye."

"No," said Yost, laying a protective hand on his rifle, "I loads him mine self. Of you loads him, you puts in too much powder. Dat ish nix goot."

He loaded the piece awkwardly enough, and they looked about them for something to shoot at. At this moment, a pair of turkey-buzzards, attracted by some corn which had been thrown on the grass, alighted about three hundred yards away, and began to feed.

"Thar's a chaince," said Jeff, eagerly. "Try yer hand at them birds off thar."

"Vat?" demanded Yost. "Dey ish too far away. I can nix shoot dem."

"Yes ye kin. 'Tain't a foot more then three hundred yards. Try them once't. I know a man that kin hold a rifle straight kin fetch 'em every time."

"Perhaps I can nix hold him straight. Some times I hold him straight, odder times I hold him more crooked ash der duyvel. Off a man vas haf deax pair of eyes, can he hit dem pirds. You shoot."

Jeff raised his rifle to his shoulder, took a steady aim, and fired. One of the birds sprung into the air and fell dead; the other rose aloft. As he did so, to the surprise of every one, Hoppen brought his rifle to his shoulder, took a quick aim, and fired. As the smoke curled slowly upward, they saw the bird, with closed wings, falling swiftly to the earth. Yost dropped his rifle and threw up his hands in astonishment.

"Gootness cracious! I vas hit de pird mit mine can!" he cried.

"Didn't you think you could hit it?" asked Dan, suspiciously. "It seems to me you meant to do it. That shot was done like an old hand in the business. Tell the truth, now. You know all about a rifle."

"Off course I knows all apout a rifles," said Hoppen, indignantly. "You dakes de little can, unt puts in some buker. Dey you puts in some buker, unt trives it down mit de rifle. Den you puts in a pail, unt wipes a buke off de rifle unt it Den you puts on a cap, unt cocks de rifle. Den you puts de eyes unt vries it off, unt trives de rifle down mit de rifle. Dat ish vat you toes. I know dat very vell."

"It must hev been a chance shot ye know," said Jeff, "'cause thar ain't many of us on the prairie c'd hit a buzzard at three hundred yards, let alone on the wing. You didn't mean to kill him, I know."

"Dat ish von lie," said Yest, calmly. "I means to kill him pad enough. Dere ish a coot many tings mit dish life vat ve means to do, put ve can't always do it. Vat ve toes mit der pird, now ve haf shot him?"

"Eat him, of course," said Jeff, winking at his companions. "Didn't ye know that this yer is one of the best birds on the plains?"

"Nix," said the Dutchman, shortly.

"I'll go and git it for ye," said Jeff, with surprising good-nature. "Ye must be tired and hungry too, seein' ez how ye hev walked a good ways. I'll cook it for ye, too."

"Vat you says? You cook dat pird vor me?"

"Yes," replied Jeff. "I wouldn't for any other man."

"You very goot. Vell, co unt git him."

Jeff walked off hastily, after making a signal to his friends to say nothing, and soon returned carrying a buzzard in a gingerly manner, as if he did not care to touch it more than was necessary. Nothing would have induced him to touch the filthy bird but the desire to play a practical joke, for which these men are famous. The rest looked on smiling, though Dan was determined not to let the joke go too far.

"Vere ish your pird?" asked Yest.

"Shot all to pieces," said Jeff. "That's a powerful good gun of mine; a mighty good one, you bet. 'Tain't often ye find a better one. That gun kin kerry a ball jist fifty mile. It kin shoot a thing jist ez far away ez a man likes to strain his eyes to see. All he's got to do is to hold it up to his shoulder, p'int it at the obje', an' pull the trigger. Ef that ain't sartin deth, raise my ha'r."

As he spoke, he was busily employed in pulling the feathers from the buzzard, with a curious contraction at the base of the nose which was not observed by Heppen. The task was done at length, and a firelighted. In a moment the bird was swallowed on a roasted stick over the fire, carefully attended to by the busy Dutchman, who relished the joke of making a Dutchman eat a very filthy buzzard heartily. Dan looked on in silence. At last he spoke:

"Did you come out here without a horse?"

The Dutchman turned a questioning look upon the face of the speaker before he answered. There was a lurking suspicion

in the dark eyes, and Hoppen thought twice before he answered.

"Nein. I cooms ons from St. Sheseph mit a goat horse. Put ons dere py der river he shtrays away unt I can nix find him. I looks vor him all von day, unt ven I gets tired, I lays down unt goes to shleep. Ven I wakes up, you vas standing me mit your hant, unt telling me off I vas not git on vith you dinks mit me, der pears would eat me. I wakes up den. I vas not want to shtay dere any longer. I pees 'trail mit der pears."

"It is a great pity you have lost your horse," said Dan. "Luckily for you, we have a spare one which you can ride. I take it for granted you know how."

"Yaw, I rides some."

"Let's git up a little game," cried Jeff, forgetting the buzzard as he saw an opening for new mischief. "Let's show Dutchy how the Indians make a move in out of bark."

"Come, come—" began Dan. "Don't go too far."

Jeff took his arm and led him aside. "Look yer, cap't'n. You must be a little keertul. Frontier men will leave their gun. They must, you know. Now, we ain't goin' to lent the Dutchman a bit. I like him. He's a right good fellow at bottom, an' ef he larns these little games from us, he won't larn 'em from some one that will use him bad. You larn't how to make a move in yourself didn't ye?"

Dan laughed. "I believe I did," he said. "Very well. Go ahead, only don't be hard on him. I think we shall find him of service before we get to the end of our bark."

"That's just the idee, cap't'n. He's got to find the ways of the woods, an' he must as well larn 'em by some way other 'n us."

They went back to the fire, and Jeff, sitting in the shadow of his "kit," which was thrown upon the grass near at hand, perceived what appeared to be a narrow piece of bark, about six inches wide and a foot long.

"See hyar, Dutchy."

"My name ish Hoppen; Yost Hoppen."

"Jernsden, want a larn 'em? All right. See hyar. Them shoes of yours is gittin' worn out in many places."

"Yaw, I pees very hard on mine shoes," said Yost. "I

year our more schoons ash would make a man so rich vat near yes. Of I could only make mine own schoons I should pee very glad."

"Ye kin ef ye want to," said Jeff. "It's mighty easy. I make mine, so do all the rest. Let ain't got wives out hyar. Look at that moccasin. Let ain't got no right to wear a plantation like that under foot out hyar on the trail. No he ain't, by gracious. Anybody could feller the trail ye leave, by follin' along the track. Ye eiter w'ar moccasins."

"I draks dat is drue," said Hoppin. "Pat how ter tuyvel vill a man wear moccasins ven he no moccasins haf? I can nix make dem."

"I'll teach ye how."

"Vill you? Dat ish goot. Dat ish better ash goot? I likes you more ash efer. Show me, den."

"Come hyar," said Jeff, holding the piece of bark he held on the ground. "Lordy. It's easy ez goose-grease. I've larn't a darned good many how to make moccasins, Indian fashion. I'm what ye might call a P. M. anthropist. Darned ef I think thar ought ter be any such words in the English language. But thar is, an' thar will be. Pat yer foot on that piece of bark."

Hoppin obeyed and placed his right foot on the bark. Jeff stepped and pretended to arrange his foot. But he did not get it in the proper position.

"Move it a little more thar way," said he. "That's right. A little more weight on it. That ain't enough. Lift up yer other foot. I want to git yer measure."

Hoppin did as he was bid, and the heels of the Dutchman appeared in the air, and his head struck the prairie grass with a dull thud. The whole thing was a trick. The bark, instead of consisting of a single piece, in reality contained two, fitted together nicely and coated with grease on the inside. The moment the victim consented to lift his foot from the ground, the upper piece is jerked suddenly away and in spite of his struggles, the victim socks his mother earth. Hoppin scrambled up, but not quickly enough, it seemed, to see Jeff set the two pieces together again.

"What ar' ye tumblin' in that way fur, you?" demanded the guide, in assumed anger. "I'd a most got yer measure when over ye went."

"I dakes mine own measure," retorted the Dutchman. "I dinks some von bushes me down."

"No sirree. Ain't nobody teched ye. Come along and git yer measure, or ye don't git no moccasins from me."

"You show me how, den," said Yost. The party gathered about them, and Jeff proceeded to show how it was done.

"Ye put yer foot on it so," he said, placing his moccasined foot in the proper position, "an' lift the other foot in this way."

"How you does him?" demanded Yost, coming nearer. "Do him again."

Jeff again placed his foot on the bark and lifted the other. Yost was very near. Bending forward suddenly, he gave a quick tug at the bark. The biter was bit. Down went Jeff amid a hearty peal of laughter, the second which had greeted his downfall that day. He sat upright with a comical expression on his face and shouted:

"Thar I is, kerwhop! An' I took the lint jest ez I teched the grass. He did it cute, too."

A new roar of laughter greeted the confession. Jeff rose, casting a puzzled look at the Dutchman, whose face was as stolid and expressionless as ever. Dan thought he detected a cunning twinkle in his blue eyes. But, the impression was gone in a moment.

"Durn me ef I don't think thar's more in that Dutchman than he lets on," muttered Jeff. "Never you mind. I'll knock him yit. He kain't always fool old Jeff. He knows his biz on a raft."

With these words he sat down at the fire and again turned his attention to the buzzard, which was cooking with any thing but a savory smell. The men moved farther out of the circle of the flame, holding their noses.

"I dinks I smell sometings," said Yost, snuffing at the air, like a war-horse.

"No ye don't," replied Jeff. "Don't git that idee into yer head. You don't smell nothing."

"Yaw. I pees sure I smells sometings mit mine nose," answered Hoppen, again elevating that organ. "'Tis nix goot, vat I smells."

"Oh, don't be foolin'. Nobody else smells nothin'. Do ye, boys?"

"No," said one of the men, who had been holding his nose and breathing through his gaping mouth for fifteen minutes.

"Darned ef I smell a thing."

"Course ye don't. 'Thar. The bird is done," said Jeff. "I don't s'pose I'll git any thanks fer my trouble. I'm always a-doin' somethin' thet I don't git no pay fur. It's jest my way. No ceremony. Take it on the stick."

Yost took the bird cautiously, holding it at arm's length.

"Vat you call him?" he said.

"That? Possible you don't know the name of the great American partridge. That's curiss. I never thought no man could be so fur behind the times ez that. That's the American partridge."

"He is a pig pird," said Yost.

"He is that; a darned big bird. Yer in luck, old man. 'Tain't offen ye git sech a animile ez that all fer nothing; cooked too."

"'Tain't right vor you to do all the vork vor nottings," said Hoppen. "I knows petter ash dat. I helps you mit some off der pird. Dere: dake der creat American partridge, unt eat him oop. I smells him too mooch mit mine nose."

"You don't mean to say thet yer gwine to make me lose all my time thet ar' way?" said Jeff. "Seems to me ef ye didn't want the bird ye mout 'a' said so."

"I gifs him to you. Vat you mat apout? Dat ish nice pird."

"Of course," replied Jeff, with a doubtful look. "Thar ain't no nicer. Eat a piece."

"I ain't hoongry mineself. I nefer vas hoongry dis night. I gifs him to you; eat all you vant."

The grin which had been getting broader every moment, suddenly broke out into a loud guffaw. Jeff looked round upon the circle of grinning faces with any thing but a pleased expression. But the humor of the thing at last affected him. The grin became reflected on his own face, and, breaking into a laugh he threw the buzzard at the head of one of the guides, who was laughing loudest, and shook Hoppen heartily by the hand. From that hour they were warm friends, and proved so to each other in many a trying situation.

CHAPTER III.

THE MIDNIGHT MESSAGE.

DAN CROWLEY took his place on guard that night, as his turn came. His companion on the watch was the half-breed, Joe Lane. This remarkable man was at one time well known in the section traversed by the courses of the North-west and Hudson Bay Companies as the Three Bites or the Red River. He was very taciturn, and it was a remarkable thing that he should choose for a companion a man like J. F. Roster, who was a continual and uniring talker. But, they had been friends for many years, and they traversed the country in all its parts. Now you would hear of them at the Three Bites; then they would be traversing the beautiful region of ice and snow south of Hudson's Bay. These men often accomplished wonderful journeys, to which the magazine journeyings are mere child's play. Over icy waters by the side of bottomless lakes, living for days without food, eating with ravenous appetites a frog or snake which fortune threw in their way, and through all maintaining a cheerful talk, which would have amused by them even in a dying hour.

If the histories of such men could be once sought out and written, what a record of noble heroism, of devotion to the cause of friendship, of steady bravery in the hour of danger, their story would show. It is the duty of the novelist and the writers of every class to rescue them from the depths of forgetfulness as much as possible of the memory of a race of men who are grand in many of their characteristics.

"Do you think it probable that we are in any danger, Joe?" asked Crowley.

"Perhaps. Good many Indians and Creoles are on the trail now. Go out to hunt, and carry some provisions under their blankets. All same. Bad time now. Chief killed up at Snake river one day. Bad Indian, but the Blackfoot like him. See how it is? They like any bad man. Some Indian, myself; some white. But my white blood strongest."

Reared for the greater portion of his life among the tribes, Joe had never been able to get over their sententious mode of speech. He was a curiosity as he sat there, with his elbows on his knees, and a long, reed-stemmed pipe in his mouth, putting out columns of smoke from his nose, a habit acquired among the savages.

"It would strangle me to smoke in that way," said Dan, laughing.

"Learned it among the Crows," said the half-breed. "Like it now. The Crows are the best tribe. Like the Nez Percés too. The Comanches and Arapahoes are thieves and murderers. Got to look out for them, or you will get into trouble. Blackfeet jus' as bad."

"I expected danger here. Some young fellows rather like it. I do, at any rate; and I think you like it too."

"None of our boys will flinch. Been on trail long time. Jeff talk great deal in camp, but, when time comes, keeps his mouth shut as well as any man. Good man, Jeff."

"What do you think of the Dutchman?"

"Don't know yet. Study him," said Joe.

"You think he needs study, then?"

"Yes. Shoots well; fooled Jeff; wrestled him down; could do that."

"We will keep an eye on him. Is he asleep?"

"Guess so. If he good man, glad to have him. Very strong."

"He is indeed. I wonder what he meant by falling asleep by the river?"

"One eye open, p'raps," said Joe. "Lots of men do that. Watch. Got your rifle. See any thing out there?"

The night was clear and still. The moon was up, and a new moon shiner fell upon all around. A hundred yards away they saw something moving silently. The next moment a figure appeared on horseback, and was off like the wind. Joe sprang to his feet, and ran after it with leveled rifle. But he did not fire, not knowing what danger the report of a rifle might bring upon them. Dan followed him on a run, and they reached the spot where the figure had stood. Something white glimmering near the ground attracting Lane's attention, he stooped and took it up, and found it to be a small piece of paper, attached to a stick thrust into the ground.

"Ha!" said Dan. "What have you there?"

"Looks like a letter," said Joe. "Read it; ain't a scholar myself."

Dan took the paper, and found it written in a female hand. Lifting it in the moonlight, he made out the words.

"Go back to your homes. Danger is about you on every hand—danger which will end in your destruction. I have warned you. Beware!"

Looking at the half-breed in the moonlight, Dan saw that his brown face had turned a little pale.

"I don't understand this," he said. "Do you, Joe?"

"Yes," said the half-breed. "It is the White Spirit."

"The White Spirit?"

"Yes. Something haunts the hills. Comes in the night to camp and warns people back. If they don't go, some of them, and sometimes all, are killed before many days. Came to me once near this very spot. I was out with Jeff Renter and two others. The Spirit came and warned us. In two days the other boys were robbed and murdered. We took the hint and dug out."

"Have you ever seen the figure?"

"Only at night, as we saw it now," replied Joe.

"The White Spirit certainly writes a very pretty hand," replied Dan, smiling. "I see you are a little infected with Indian superstition, Joe. If this were a spirit, there would be no occasion to resort to the very earthly process of writing letters. If there had been a postscript or two, I should have thought it was a woman."

He turned the paper over again and found a little more writing.

"I am your friend; I would save you. I pray you, go away."

"*There it is,*" said Dan. "It is a woman."

Joe looked sullen. "Perhaps you want to say next: I never see it. Come often, tell you. Jeff has seen it. Always in moonlight. Gives some sign of danger and then away."

"Don't it seem a little curious that a spirit needs a horse?" asked Dan.

"Don't believe me. Wait; stay here and lose your scalp. May if you want to."

"Don't get angry, Joe; I mean no harm. But, I am not to blame if I do not believe in spirits. I was taught the other way. Shall we wake the rest and tell them?"

"Do you mean to stay?"

"Certainly; I mean to have my hunt out."

"Then keep still; don't tell. All guides leave you if they hear you see White Spirit. *They* believe; *they* know. Seven times the White Spirit come down from the hills. Seven times the camp is full of sorrow. Some man dead; sometimes all. Their bones bleach in the sun because they would not take warning, like you."

"Would you have me run away like a coward? We came out here to hunt."

"If you not afraid, neither be I," said Joe. "Go back to camp. Keep your letter."

"I'll bet you the price of a new rifle I see and speak with your White Spirit before we leave the foothills."

"Speak to it! You crazy, I guess."

"Dare you bet?"

"Speak to it. You die! No man look spirit in the face. There are spirits in the rocks and trees, and they hear the words you say. They will carry your words to the White Spirit!"

"Let them carry as many of my words as they like. But, if I do not see and speak with this White Spirit before we return, I will make you a present of my rifle. You have often said it is a good piece."

"And if you do, I will give you ten prime beaver-pelts. That's agreed."

They went back to the camp. As they approached it, they saw some one moving back on his hands and knees. At that distance, it was impossible to say who it was, and when they arrived at the camp, every man lay wrapped in his blanket, blissfully unconscious of any danger. The Dutchman especially was snoring in such a way as to awaken the ninth of Dan. The performance of a new beginner on the trombone was nothing to it. A gurgle, a gasp, and then a rolling snore, formed part of each bar of the concerted piece he was performing upon the instrument which had "schemelled something" wrong in the turkey buzzard.

"Who was it that left the camp just now and came in before us, Joe?" said Dan.

"Don't know. Thought it was Dutchy. He sleep pretty sound."

"Yes."

"Don't you think he sleep too round for so early in the evening?" said Joe, in a slightly suspicious tone.

"I never should have thought of that," said Dan. "No I don't think there can be any doubt as to the reality of that snore."

"All right, perhaps. I don't know. Don't talk to me. I want to think."

Through all that tedious night-watch the half-breed never spoke to his companion, but sat with his head upon his knees, smoking in that odd way of his, and apparently plunged deep in thought. As the morning came, the men began to stir, and Jeff rolled lazily out of his blanket, with a start and gasp. Yost was still snoring.

"Dienna ye hear the pibroch?" said Dan, winking at Jeff.

"What's the yeabroth?" said Jeff.

"The Scotch bagpipes."

"Bagpipes? It's a wind-barrel. Hark to him, boys. Hear the Dutchman tune his fiddle. Oh, gall-ry, ain't it just splendid! If I ain't charmed, darn me if I am. Give him a dig in the ribs, Joe."

The half-breed did as desired, and Yost sat up with a rumpled head, stretching himself, and distorting his visage in an odd manner. Some of the party laughed.

"You besser look a little oos, vat you do? I guess der heaviest sleeper mit America. Yaw. Der ish not so much ash von feller vat kin sleep so long vat I can."

"Were you not up during the night?" asked the young man, looking at him keenly.

The face of the German did not change. "Up. Yaw. I was up. I was up in der chair. I was asleep."

"You are sure of that?"

"I nefer was sure mit any t'ings," replied Yost. "I lies town here unt den I forgits whether I was asleep or not. I nefer wakes oop to see."

"You are a wit, I see."

"A vit? Vat ish dat?"

"You make jokes."

"Shokes? I neter makes a shoke in mine life. A shoke? Ven I dalks mit you, I dalks trut'. Notting but trut'. So I tell's you."

"Umph!" grunted Joe. "No more talk. Get ready. Off this morning."

"Whar we gwine at now, Joe?" asked Jeff Rooten.

"Higher up the foothills. Git some place where we safe. Guess we find a place, eh, Jeff?"

"Yea bet ye! Is Datchy goin'?"

"S'pose so," said Joe. "Jus' as he likes."

"Yaw," said Yost. "I coos mit you. I neter likes to shay one here mit ter pears. I vill shoot a pear some day mit mine cun."

"I reckon ye kin," said Jeff. "I mind how ye shot that ar' buzzard."

"Creat American patridge," said Yost. "Yaw. I shoots him."

Rooten looked particularly foolish. He had hoped that Happon would forget the name he had given the turkey buzzard.

"Why yes," he said, sheepishly. "We call 'em turkey buzzard out hyar sometimes."

"Vell, dat ish not so goot name. I call's dem creat American patridge."

"He has you, Jeff. You may as well own up. Get out your horses, boys. Happon, yonder is your horse. The roan with the white star in his forehead. Look out for him. There is no better horse in the foothills when you are once in the saddle, but he is hard to back."

Yost approached the roan with a hesitating step. The horse throw his ears back viciously and uttered a defiant snort. Any judge of a horse would have been on the alert for a kick or kick. The Dutchman did not seem to pay any attention, with the roan dated out his long neck and made a savage lunge at him. Happon, with extreme agility, acted a coward upon his name, imitating the posture of the father of evil, in the garden of Eden. The roan ran to the extreme length of the lance and made two or three passes at him.

The next moment the two were down together on the green-sward.

How it was done no one could say. They saw the brawny hand of Hoppen shoot out and seize the leg of the roan, and the next moment he was sprawling on the grass. A short struggle took place, a trial of brute force and manly will, and manhood triumphed. Yest rose and the roan lay trembling at his feet. The Dutchman touched him with his foot and he rose and stood panting. Hoppen threw on the saddle-cloth, put on the saddle, looked at his teeth, tightened the girths, and sprung upon his back. They saw in a moment that he was a practiced horseman. There was another thing which puzzled Dan. This was the case with which he adapted himself to the Mexican saddle, which at this time was hardly used except upon the plains. Hoppen seemed to know all about it, and lashed his stirrups after the manner of mountain men, in a way entirely different from the manner of the old school of horsemanship.

"Where did you learn to ride?" asked Dan, as the party rode away beside the shining stream. Hoppen looked up with an odd smile. There was something so cunning in it that Dan felt more and more the conviction that this man was not what he seemed. But, the first words he spoke were so transcendently Dutch that he was immediately ashamed of his suspicions.

"I learn mit St. Shoseph. I lifs out of town, mit a varm. I keeps goot many horses. I nefer vinds von I vas afraid to ride."

"How did you tame that fellow? I was a little afraid you had more than your match."

"I trow him down," said Yest, nodding.

"So I saw. But how? That is a strong horse and you are not a very large man."

Hoppen stretched out an arm for Dan to inspect. He ran his fingers along the powerful limb above the elbow, and felt the muscles, hard as wrought iron.

"You are very strong."

"A little. I trow Jeff easy. Now I look. He is a good man; he drags man, put he fool too much. Get him some day. Vere you coes now?"

"Into the mountain, to hunt for the beast known as the Indian devil—the Carcajou. I hope we may find one."

"Nefer see von?"

"No. By all accounts, they are not the most lovely thing in the world to tackle. But I want one, and I'll have him."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MOUNTAIN PATH.

THEY left the plains behind and entered the passes of the hills. On either hand rose rugged cliffs, with low growths of pine and spruce upon the sides. A gloomy place. Dark shadows fell upon the path they trod, from cliff and pine trees overhanging it. In some places the road was so narrow that they were forced to advance in Indian file. Joe rode in front. Dan followed, next to Lim Yost. The two guides and Becker brought up the rear. They were a strong and well-appointed body of men for that region, and men whom a band of savages would have hesitated long before attacking. Their knives and pistols were of the most approved manufacture, and any one of them could hit a man with a rifle-ball at six hundred yards.

"We oughter know this hole, Jeff," said Joe, looking back at his comrade. "This is the place where we lost two of our boys. Never understood how it were done."

"'Twas the White Spirit," said Jeff. "You know it were, Joe Lane."

"So 'twas," said Nat Farrel, one of the guides. "I never thought of that. The White Spirit haunts these hills. I don't like it overly well."

"Nor I neither," said Jim Arnold, the other guide. "Say, Jeff, I s'pose you couldn't find no other place to hunt only here?"

"Didn't Dan say he wanted to track a carcajou? I only ask you fair, Jim Arnold. Do you know any better place to look for the Indian devil? Say, now?"

"No, I don't," grumbled Jim. "But I don't like to ~~face~~ the White Sperrit."

"No more do I, Jim. But, we must have the cure-jew. Didn't Den say that if we took one, it would be two hundred dollars right in our fists? Ain't that so?"

"All right, Jeff. Never thought of that. White Sperrits be cur—l. Whose afraid? I ain't, for one. That's fifty dollars a piece. If I git that, an' I ever hold kings and aces in old sledge, I won't back down ~~now~~. I ain't got money enough. Now you bet."

"Them keards will be the death of you yet, Jim Arnold. Don't I know you? As soon as ever you git my money in your fist, what must you do but go your pile on kings and, calculating to fill. You kain't aches do it, and if you do, somebody will be sure to draw a flesh hand and then what's your kings and, eh? I don't say nothin' agin keards. They ar' a providence to us trappers and gildes. Like ez not we would git into some divilry if it wa'n't for an honest game of poker or old sledge. But, bet in reason, Jim."

"I don't reckon that's any man that sits under the name o' Jeff Rooter kin kick me at keards. I calculate I'm the best poker-player in this kentry. Yes, I do."

"All wrong, Jim. All ye know of keards I told ye. Ye know thet."

"Don't lie now, Jeff. I kin kick any man that see I ain't a better player than any of the Rooter family, father or son."

"That means ye kin kick me, don't it? Don't jump off that horse and send for me credit. You don't know me, I reckon. I'm the great Praying Pilgrim. I'm the best hunter in the Rocky Mount. You've been told of me when that took a bull-hell by the tail and knocked out his brains agin' a pine stump? 'Faint's worth to see, but I did it."

"You don't say," muttered Jim, glancing slowly from his horse and throwing the bridle to him. "Oh, never mind. I'm the Almighty Governor of the Free Rock. I don't have to depend on no man. You took an independent horse, and he was by the tail and knocked out his brains, did you? That ain't nothing, that ain't. Did you ever see me pull up a tree by the roots? Oh, git down."

Jeff was off in a moment, but Hoppen jumped down and catching the two men by the breast, held them at arm's length, in spite of their struggles.

"Kill the damned Dutchman," roared Jim; "what business has he to interfere with white men?"

"You keep still, or I knocks your head against der rock," replied the Dutchman, coolly. "Coom, coom. I'm not afraid mit you. Keep still. Vat you want to fight for?"

"Didn't he call me a liar?" roared Jeff, struggling to get away. "I want his scalp. Wahoo! Yip! Let me hit at him. He deserves to die."

"He said he could beat me at poker, he did," shouted Jim.

"I knocks your heads together if you don't keep still. Now you listen mit me. Off you promise me not to fight mit each udder, I let you go."

"This is sheer nonsense, Jeff," said Dan. "I am ashamed of you."

Jeff began to be a little abashed now that his anger began to cool. "I ain't got nothin' ag'in' Jim," said he. "But he ain't got no call to crow over me, hez he?"

"I tell you what to do," said Dan. "Let it rest until you get back to St. Louis after this trip, and then play against each other. But don't fight."

"Good enough, old man," said Jeff. "I agree. Do you, Jim?"

"Sure!" said Jim, extending his hand. Their little difference adjusted, they became better friends than ever, and for hours they rode side by side through the mountain pass, where it was wide enough, but that of their exploits in those regions. Hoppen listened with a quiet smile. Dan, who had been following him up to this time, rode up to and entered it to converse with him. He found, under the rude plaid shawl of the German, a vein of native cunning and shrewd good sense, which did not so much astonish him after what he had seen him do that day, and the evening before. Jeff regarded him with interest. The ease with which he had held both himself and the other guide had astonished him, at the same time giving him a high opinion of their strange companion's physical strength.

The party passed through a narrow defile in the mountain and entered upon a verdant table-land, a thousand feet above the level plain which they had quitted half a day before. At this moment a clear, sweet voice called them to halt. Turning in surprise, they saw a woman standing on a flat rock a hundred feet above them, leaning upon a small rifle and looking down at them. A glorious woman! Her hair, unbound, was lifted by the passing breeze, and swept in waving curls about her symmetrical form. Her dress was a sort of tunic, and a sash of the same material was thrown over her shoulder and knotted at her waist. Her feet were small and shod in dainty boots, slashed and embroidered in a fanciful manner.

"Where do you go?" she cried. "Halt there. I would have speech with you."

Astonishment kept them silent. Such a vision as this, appearing to them in the midst of the savage scenery, and on a great rock, might well surprise them. Dan was the first to find his voice.

"You ask us where we are going with the air of one who has a right," he said. "We are going on a hunt."

"Turn back then, while there is yet time," she said. "I warn you back from this terrible place, as I have warned many another. If you take my advice, it shall be well with you. The prairies are broad enough for us all. Leave to those who claim it the right to patrol these passes, as they have done for years."

"Others claim the pass, then?"

"Yes. They are not the ones to warn you back. That is my office. If you are foolhardy enough to keep on, after what I have said, you do it at your peril."

"We accept the peril, and refuse to go back, unless we know what we have to fear. You see the men I have with me. They are not the ones to go back without reasons. You must give them to us."

"Other men have acted as you do," replied the girl, with an angry flush. "I have no more to say. I leave you to your own devices."

"Stay," said Dan, as she turned to go away. "A word before you go. Was it you who sent us the warning last night?"

"Ask no questions, for I will answer none. You have marked out your own course. Walk in it, if you will. For my part, I have done all in my power to save you. But, you will not be saved. Go your ways and I will go mine."

While she held them in conversation, Jeff Rooter had ridden forward at a quick pace. As she turned to go away, he suddenly appeared beside her on the rock and seized her in his arms before she could use the rifle.

"Loose your hold, rascal. How dare you touch me?" she cried.

Unheeding her words, Jeff raised her in his arms and descended the cliff rapidly, while Dan called out to him angrily to let her go. Shortly after he appeared among them, panting for breath, and holding her firmly.

"There," he said, letting her feet rest upon the ground and still holding her hands. "Now you've got her. Make her tell what she means."

"Release her, Jeff," said Dan, pushing his companion back. "How dare you insult a woman?"

Jeff released his hold and she stepped back with leveled rifle, looking angrily at the party.

"I am here," she said. "What do you want with me?"

"Nothing," replied Crowley. "You are free."

"Thank you. I know you, Rooter. I will teach you better than to lay hands upon me. It is well for you that you held me, or I would have shot you down like a dog. No one ever yet touched Mail Marian in anger who did not repent it at some time."

"If you let her go, I won't be responsible for the result," said Jeff. "She kin be made to tell you what you want."

"Dat's right," said Yost. "Make her shpeak. Vat right I want a woman to hold her tongue? Vup her, ef she won't shpeak."

"Be silent, fellow," replied Dan, in high anger. "Believe me, miss, this rudeness was not intended on my part. I speak only for myself and for my men. A moment's thought will convince Rooter that he is wrong."

"I know him well enough," she replied, "although he does not know me. I will never forget this insult on his part. Am I free to go?"

"Certainly," replied Dan.

She turned to go away, but came back. The generous behavior of the young man had touched her, and she wished to do something to repay it.

"I wish you would take warning," she said. "There are dangers here of which you have no conception. I cannot unseen, and of which I can not speak. I would do it if I could. It ought to be enough for you if I warn you that these mountains are fatal to all who enter them."

"We are grateful to you for your interest in our welfare, but we will not go back. If you know those from whom this danger is to come, let me warn them. We are not men to be trifled with and will not submit tamely to be robbed or murdered. Let them remember this."

"You will not be warned. Farewell, then, and when the time comes, remember that Maid Marian warned you in the Robbers' Pass."

She turned, and darted up the rocks with the agility of the mountain goat. Upon the summit she paused and made them a mute gesture of farewell, which was full of dignity and grace. The next moment the rock was vacant, and the party stood dumbfounded, gazing at the spot where she had stood.

"Now let me ask why you didn't keep the damned witch?" growled Jeff. "You see if trouble don't come out of it."

"Don't let me see you take hold of a lady in that way again, Mr. Rooter, while you are under my orders."

"Oh. You don't say! A lady, too! That devil say she knows me. I don't know her. But, if you don't wish you'd kept her for a safeguard, then my name ain't Jeff Rooter. Come along."

CHAPTER V.

A NEW-COMER.

THEY made a camp in a secluded pass among the mountains, not a mile from the spot where they had seen the mountain mail. Jeff Rooter was the leading spirit of the camp, and the other guides naturally looked to him for advice, unless he assumed too much, when they at once asserted their own dignity, after the manner of free trappers and guides.

"Thar's a man in these yer regions I'd like to hev in the camp, ef he c'd be got," said Jeff, one day, as they came back from a deer-hunt. "He's the best man among us. None of the boys are at all afraid to allow that old trapper Ben is the boss."

Yest drew near with an appearance of interest, which did not escape the attention of Dan, who was watching him closely.

"Trapper Ben?" said Dan. "Who is he?"

"Ben Miska is his name. He's tramped these plains time out of mind, an' thar ain't a man atween Laramie and the Colorado that don't know him. He's been a Crow chief in his time. That ain't all. He hates Blackfeet like death, an' he reckons it's his duty to see that nobody is wronged by 'em but the boys. I wish he was hyar."

"Do you know where to find him? I would pay him well to join us."

"I don't know where to place him jest now. Last time I seen him was up on the North R. R. trappin'. Thar used to be fencer's land in 'em grooves hyar, but they ar' nigh all cut down now. I don't reckon you'll object to let in' the boys work for themselves when they ain't huntin' for you?"

"Not at all," said Dan.

"Because, ef they kin pick up a little somethin' by the'r-selves, aside from what you pay 'em, it's so much clear gain. The ground ain't nigh so good ez 'twas oncet, but it ain't

quite bad. Thar's han'some pelts to be got by them thet's thrifty."

Yost took to the work with unusual aptitude, which awakened the suspicions of Jeff Rooter more and more. His success was something almost wonderful. It was rather early for trapping, but the nights were very cold, though no snow had fallen as yet. Besides two or three packs of beaver-skins, Yost secured a number of martins and mink, and several other skins.

But the Dutchman had an enemy who was more than his match. Nearly every day one of his traps which he had set in a favorable place, was dragged out of the water and its contents devoured. It was no human thief who did the deed, for they would never have torn the skin into strips and patches, and left the bones scattered on the ground, gnawed clean of flesh. The thief was partial to that particular trap. Not a day passed but Yost suffered loss both in his pockets and morals. For every beaver lost caused him to swear terribly, a habit which was fearfully developed in him. He told his troubles to Jeff Rooter, and the old guide went out with him to view the ground.

"I know what it is," said he, looking at the scattered remains of a fine beaver. "Only one animal c'd do the heart to do it."

"Vat is it?"

"It's a wolverine, an' no mistake," said Jeff. "I'll bet money a wolverine knows more than any man in this camp."

"Vat ish a wolverine?"

"Don't you know? It's one of the damnest things ye ever saw in the shape of an animal. Scall! Good Lord, they'll beat a Blackfoot, chew me into inch pieces if they won't. The damnest critter! How many times hev she cleaned out yer trap?"

"More ash seven dimes, so help me cracker," said the Dutchman.

"Yes? An' she'll do it every time thar's any thing in it so long as you set a trap for beaver. Why don't ye set a deadfall for her?"

"I don't know him," said Yost.

"I'll show it to ye, then," said the other. "Durn it, we kain't be eaten up by the varmint. Show me whar she comes."

They went up the cañon about a quarter of a mile. The trap was set in a sheltered nook close to the base of a rocky bluff. Jeff laughed heartily to see so many bones scattered on every hand, the remains of the wolverine's visits at various times.

"You may laff off you wants to, Sheff Rooter. Shpose dese vash shote from you, maybe you laff t'other side off your mouth."

"I kain't help havin' a laugh about sech a sight ez thet thar. Don't stop me. Let a chap laugh, kain't ye?"

"Dere!" cried Yost. "He's peen here ag'in. Look at my trap."

There indeed was the article in question, pulled up out of the water with the hind legs of a fine beaver sticking in it, the result of the last raid.

"Oh cracious to gootness!" cried Yost, "vat a sight ish dat vor mine eyes to see. I dinks dat ish vorse nor any t'ings vat I sees. Dat peaver vash te pig feller vat I dries to get so long. Ach, mein Gott! Let us catch dat wolverine unt Shina shall cook him, unt so help me cracious ash I vill eat him."

Jeff showed him how to do the work, and he set about making a deadfall. In an hour it was done. He wanted to stay and see the wolverine come into the trap, but the trapper would not let him do so.

"Don't ye try it," he said. "The cunnin' varmint kin smell a man half a mile off, easy enough. Ye kain't think how much they know. A man ain't got any chance with them, 'cause they won't come within gun-shot unless they're berry hungry. Tain't off'n we kin git a wolverine. Come away. I ain't sure the deadfall will fetch her. Ef thar is any way to git under it, or over it, she'll do it."

The bait which Yost had placed on the end of the deadfall was so arranged that if any thing pulled at it, a weight fell from the other end of the log and it dropped across the body of the thief, generally breaking its back. The trap he built was a good one, and he had great faith in its success.

During the afternoon he went up to see if any thing was in the trap. Jeff was with him. As they came near, they could see that the log had fallen.

"Ye've got him!" cried Yost.

"Don't be too sure of that," replied Jeff. "Ye kin't catch a wolverine every day."

He was right. When they came to the spot, they found the trap empty both of thief and meat. Too cunning to go under the log, the wolverine had gone on it, and poked at the meat from above. Of course the trap fell, but the thief, after eating the bait, walked coolly away. Yost was in a rage. He swore oaths which none but German lips can attain without incurring the danger of lockjaw. He called down all kinds of anathemas on the head of the unfortunate thief, while Jeff stood by, shaking with laughter.

"I judge ye kin't answerable for swearing after such a loss as that ar'," said he. "I'd swar too. But what ar' ye g'in' to do?"

"I fix him dis dimes, so ash my name ish Yost Hapen. Wait; it ish getting late. I fix him."

He went back to camp and returned shortly with a lariat and some more bait. He then loaded his gun, putting in a double charge of powder and a handful of lead-shot. He then climbed a tree and suspended the gun from the limbs of the lariat, in such a way that a pull on the muzzle would discharge it. To the muzzle he attached a piece of meat, in a tempting manner.

"Dere!" he cried, contemplating his invention with great pride. "You see vat ish done. Pannye cooms voverine, dakes holt off'n de meat. Pept bang! She ke's over. Dat ish goot. Yaw!"

"That's a good trap," said Jeff. "I judge that will fix her fast eternally. If it don't, I'm a liar. Let's go back to camp."

They did so—Yost looking back lovingly at his invention, and declaiming loudly in relation to its merits. On the way back they stopped at such of their traps as lay between them and camp, and took out the spoils found there. Jeff had just taken a fine beaver from a trap, when he heard the report of the gun they had left.

"Thar she goes!" he cried. "Anyway, yer trap hez not failed to git the gun off."

"Vat you pets dat I haf not kid von volverine?" cried the Dutchman.

"I'll bet five beaver-pelt ag'in' a single one," said Jeff.

"I takes dat pet, Snell. I makes finif beaver skins so easy ash nothing vas. Coom; ve sees unt prims in my volverine."

It was now dark, and Jeff did not care to go back. But he had bet, and wanted the bet decided. So there was nothing for it but to go. It did not take long to reach the place where the trap had been set. The gun no longer hung in the tree. The wolverine did not lie dead at the roots. But there lay the gun, as it had fallen.

"The cure varmint?" said Ben. "See what she's done!"

The animal had climbed the tree and gnawed off the limb, letting the gun fall. Of course it went off, and before the trappers arrived upon the scene, the strange beast was away into the depths of the forest, carrying the bait which she had so richly earned.

The rage of poor Yost passed all description. As before, he danced about, sweating his entire vocabulary of choice Dutch oaths, much to the delight of Jeff, who stood near enjoying the scene.

"This yer is too tough a c't for ye to manage," he said. "Let me take hold of her. I judge that thar is only one way to fetch her, an' now that she hev bothered ye so, I'm the man to ketch her. It's an old head, too; none of yer fools of animiles, ye bet."

"Vat ye do, Snell?" asked Yost, in high displeasure.

"You no petter ash I pe. You can nix catch her. She pects too mooch vor you."

"I calculate not, old man. Perhaps ye don't know me. Now stand aside an' let a feller work as knows how."

The first thing he did was to bend down a small tree to a level with the stump of a tree which he had cut down, and fasten it tightly so that it could not spring back. In the top of this tree he placed a huge trap, one of the strongest he had, which happened to be set near at hand. This he baited with a choice piece of meat. When all was done, he undid

the fastenings and placed it in such a way that the moment the trap sprung and the animal caught began to struggle, the tree would spring into the air. The trap itself was so buried under the leaves that an animal, to reach the bait, must get upon the body of the tree and cross it. When all was ready, Yost accompanied the trapper back to camp, grumbling at the ill success of his last trap. Jeff said nothing.

"I dells you tish no goot," said the Dutchman. "You can nix catch her, anyhow. Don't I know? S'pose I pees a vool? Dish ish no wolverine, vat dakes mine peaver; dat ish all voolishness; dis ish von tuyvel, unt nothing else; dat ish vat I dinks; yaw."

"I'll ketch him fer all that," said Jeff. "Does ye know who I learned the trick from? 'Twas Trapper Ben; old Ben Millin, as I was tellin' ye 'bout. He's 'bout the cutest varmint ye ever see, that old Ben."

"I likes to see hiim."

"They say he's got a new cummerade lately—a big Dutchman named Snyder—Jan Snyder. I never see him, but they do say he's nigh about ez smart ez the old man hisself."

"Doochmans smart? You's voolin' mit me now, Siet Rooter. You nefer dinks a Doochmans i-h smart."

"Yes I does; you be, fer one. Bat never mind that. You want to see me ketch a wolverine the way old Ben does it. You jest lay low an' keep shady; old Jeff kin do it. They kain't fool him wuth a cent."

"Do it to-night," pleaded Yost.

"No, to-morrer."

They returned to camp and said nothing about the wolverine. Next morning, quite early, they started for the trap. Jeff, much to the disgust of Yost, insisted upon stopping every now and then at his traps and taking out the captives. "He wa'n't goin' to lose his time," he said. In vain Yost begged him to proceed, for he was in a hurry to get to the trap, and see if the animal was taken. At length they reached the trap, and Yost uttered a wild shout of triumph.

The top of the tree was swaying in the air, and there, dangling by one foot, hung the wolverine, her feet just brushing the earth below. It was a huge animal, and she turned her

vicious lead from side to side to catch a glimpse of the new-comers. Jeff echoed the cry of his companion and started forward on the run. The wolverine began to struggle, knowing the fate in store for it, and sent up its low, peculiar note of alarm.

"That she lings, the cantankerous reptile," said Jeff. "Now d'ye say I kin't ketch a wolverine?"

"You did it bully, Jeff," said some one near them, in a quiet tone. Jeff looked up quickly, and brought his rifle forward, but checked himself when he saw who the new-comer was, darted forward, and began to shake hands with him earnestly. It was an old man, hale and strong yet, with many streaks of gray running through his once raven locks. The face was a peculiar one, but full of spirit, and the black eyes had fire enough in them yet. His dress was that of the trapper and guide. He carried a rifle of the most approved make, and a splendid revolver hung in his belt.

"Ben Miffin! By gracious, I'm glad to see ye."

"Same to ye, old boy," replied Ben. "Come out with a huntin' party of boys from the towns, I judge?"

"Jess so, Ben."

"Likely to lose yer skulps, too. It beats all human natur' how resky boys will be."

"I ain't quite a *boy*, Ben Miffin."

"Yes ye be. Yer a boy to *me*, Jeff Rooter. Oh, git out. I've tramped these pararies too much not to know what I'm talkin'. Danger! That ain't no word fer it, Jeff. Don't think I've bin asleep. I've bin a-watchin' ye, mighty clost. I knowed of danger ye didn't know nothin' 'bout. Yes I cill."

"Then why didn't ye come an' tell us, Ben?" said Jeff, reproachfully.

"Teach yer grandmother, Jeff Rooter. I sorter reckon I orter know when to speak an' when to keep still. Mout be ye've seen the White Sperrit."

"How did ye know that?"

"Never you mind. Didn't it warn ye to git up an' dust? Now, why didn't ye take advice? I ain't overly fond of these youngsters that comes out hyar so oft'n nowadays. They drive all the game from the plains. Time was when I c'u'd

drop a deer or a buffler on any spot of ground I liked. I ain't do it now, an' I'm minded to travel farther west. It's gittin' too closely settled about yer fer my way of thinkin'."

Closely settled! Jeff could not conceal a smile as he looked about him. There stood the eternal hills, as they had stood for ages. The river flowed at their feet, and the trees hung heavy upon the mountain side.

"Yer thinkin' it don't look none too much like bein' settled about yer. Melbe it don't look so to you, but does to me. I've seen the day when to see a white man in this region twice a year would be a wonderful thing. 'Tain't so now. An' besides, thar's more lyar than you think."

"Who be they?"

"I ain't goin' to tell ye now. 'Twould only make ye uneasy like, an' that wouldn't do no good. No, wait till the time comes. Though I'm jubes it would be better ef ye would couple up an' leave."

"We won't."

"All right; stay ef ye like; I ain't goin' to say nothin' ag'in' it, am I? Not a bit. But look yer. I'm goin' to watch ye. When I holler, look out fer danger."

"You'll let us know?"

"You bet ye. Old Ben Miffin is old Ben Miffin yet, an' he ain't goin' to stand by an' see wrong done to any one, not ef he knows it. 'Specially a white haman. I'm garden of every one that risks his neck among the Black Hills. They will do it. These young men will come lyar, though I've warned them not, ag'in and ag'in. But since they do come, old Ben Miffin is the'r garden. Who bet he? Does ye see this yer rifle?"

"She's a beauty, Ben. Gosh! I wish't I owned such a one."

"It's five year gone by when the boy ez sent me that shock hams with me at old Laramie an' sed'd me go out on the plains. Morris his name is; Bentley Morris. A brave haman true—a chap that it wouldn't be a man so much to lose his life fer. Wal, I stood by him in danger an' he stood by me. Last spring when I went to Laramie the crowd sez to me, 'Ben,' sez he, 'thar's a packige lyar far ye.' Now I thart a packige was one of them steamboats that run up an' down

the river, an' I told him I didn't want to go nowhar. 'You're mistaken,' sez he. 'Some one hez sent ye somethin'.' An' he brung it out. Thar was a note from *her*, in her own hand-write, the gal that was with us in danger."

"Who's she?"

"Her name was Milly. A beauty, she was. Not sech a beauty ez the White Spirit, ye understand, 'cause she lays over anythin' I ever see. She wasn't proud like the White Spirit. But she used to call me father Ben, an' that took me, somehow. If I ever wish't I had a darter truly, it were then. A lovable gal like that 'un makes a man feel queer."

"Ye've bin married, though."

"I guess so. My wife was a Crow. The Green Snake was her name. A lively critter, she was. I'll back her to make things lively fur any man. I've traveled round some, myself, an' I've tried to trade off that woman to any responsible human, but I kain't do it. She ain't a bad lookin' female, fur an Injun, but Lord! When did any woman hev *her* tongue? Sae'd talk a peaceable man stone-blind in half a year's time. I've been lookin' round fur a deaf man that would like to tackle her. A deaf 'un would be a good joke on her, I'll bet."

"So 'twould," said Jeff, laughing.

"I tried to sell her to Jan Schneider onc't," said Ben with a sly glance at the immovable figure of the Dutchman who stood leaning on his rifle during the conversation, and making no attempt to join in it. "I told him about her, an' blame my cats ef he'd give a knife fur her—jest a common back-horn handled butcher-knife. He was a queer 'un. Never knew Jan, did ye, Jeff?"

"Never," said Jeff. "I were speakin' to this man 'bout him a minit ago. His name is Yost Hoppen. Dutchy, this yer is Ben Mitten, what I told ye about."

"How you do, Penn?" said Yost, calmly, and with a smile which Jeff could not fathom. "I hope you peety vell."

"Service to ye, Mister what's yer name. I'm comfortable enough. Hope yer peety peart. Ye make me think of Jan Schneider. Yer ez like ez two peas."

"Vere Jan now?" asked Yost.

"He ain't fur away," said Ben, with a sly wink. "Not

overly fur. I kin git him by a whistle, ef I'm minded to it. Wal, onc't more, Jeff, look out fur yerself. Thar's them in these hills ain't overly fond of ye, an' nout be ye'll git into trouble. But ef the wust comes to the wust, yer party is all *men*, an' men ar' easier to handle than females."

"Won't ye come in an' see the boys? Thar's some among 'em would be glad to see ye. So would the gentleman. He was a-sayin' no later than day before yesterday that he would give money to hev you with us."

"Would he though?"

"You kin bet on it."

"Then I'm the'r man, sure. I'll go in an' see what they've got to say. Ef so be they keer to hev me, I'm open to make honest money any way I kin. I heern tell ye was minded to take a carcajou. 'Tain't every one knows whar to find one. I does."

"Come along. Yer the man we want."

They entered the camp together, where Yost triumphantly produced the ears of the wolverine as an evidence that he would eat no more beaver. The simple faith and readiness of Ben struck the hunters favorably and he was engaged to stay with the party while in that region. He claimed the right to go away for three days first, promising to come back at the end of that time. He left the camp just at dusk. Not long after Yost strolled out alone toward the river-side. An hour passed, and Jeff went to look for him. He searched high and low in vain. The Dutchman was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

A VISITOR.

THE surprise occasioned by the sudden departure of the Dutchman passed away after a day or so. Free trappers get used to these things, and they comforted themselves with the supposition that he had left behind the results of his trapping since they had come to the camp. Opening the cache with

the intention of dividing the spoil among themselves, their purpose changed. Every skin belonging to Yost had disappeared. He was honest enough, however, to refrain from touching any thing which did not belong to him. The traps which had been lent him by Jeff Rooter and the rest, were left where he had set them.

"He'll come back," said Jeff. "I ain't off'n fooled in a man. He'll be sure to come back; if he's gone away, he's gone for a good reason. Don't go back on him too soon. He don't look like a bad man; Ben Miffin said so."

"He went away soon after Ben did," said Daniel, musingly. "There may be something in it. Let us wait."

"Somebody coming," said the half-breed at this moment, raising his hand for silence.

The talking ceased, and every eye was turned toward the entrance to the cañon. The rapid beat of coming hoofs could be heard, and in a moment a white horse dashed into the valley, bearing upon his back the girl known as the White Spirit. She was looking over her shoulder in an attitude of fear, and Dan sprung into the saddle, closely followed by Jeff Rooter and the half-breed. Just then the heads of other horses appeared at the entrance of the cañon, and three Indians, with lances at rest, came on in pursuit of the flying girl.

Seeing the determined attitude assumed by the trappers and hunters, whom it was plain they had not expected to see, the Indians drew rein, and fled back over the path they had so lately traversed, at their best speed. By the time they had turned, Dan Crowley had reached the side of the girl, and laid his hand upon her left thigh.

It seemed to him that she looked more beautiful to-day, flushed by the exercise of hard riding, than she had that day upon the mountain side. Her eyes were downcast before the bold orbs of the young man.

"You were in danger," he said. "I am glad you came upon us so lucky. You are safe here."

"I thank you, sir," she said. "You have indeed rendered me a service. But that my horse stumbled in coming up the pass, I should have escaped easily. But Gipsy sprained her ankle badly. You will allow me to proceed."

"If you must hurry away, there is no man here who would

attempt to stop you—not even Jeff Rector, who was inclined to keep you as a hostage the other day. He will not do it again.”

“No,” said Jeff, “though I hold to it yet, that if we c’d keep her in the camp, we sh’d be safe.”

“You know much of the secrets of the hills,” she said. “But you do not know all. I should be a living, breathing calamity to you.”

“Then don’t stay,” said Jeff. “Do ye know a man call’d Ben Millin?”

“I have seen him often. He saved me from death by the feet of a herd of buffaloes. I have much to thank him for.”

“He is goin’ to be one of our party in a day or two,” said Jeff.

She looked at him angrily.

“It seems to me that every one I care for in the least will perish by getting himself into danger, simply to annoy me. Why have you entrapped that brave old man? He knows the danger better than any of you, and yet he will run his head into it, in this blind, reckless way. Why place me under obligations for which I feel that I must make a base return?”

“You have done no harm to any one here,” said Dan.

“Have done. You know nothing of it. I warned you all, as far as lay in my power; I would have saved you; but, what could I do when all were against me? My power extends only thus far: I can warn you: if you refuse to take warning, be it on your own heads. But Ben Millin must not come among you.”

“In two days he will be here and take the lead of the party,” said Dan. “I do not understand your warning. Is he not a worthy man?”

“None more so; and therefore I would save him,” she replied.

“From what?”

“I have not the power to tell.”

“Let it pass, then. Do you know the tribe of the Indians who pursued you just now?”

“Certainly; they were Crows.”

“Might they not have been Blackfeet?”

"I do not fear Blackfeet; these were Crows," she answered.

Dan looked at the half-breed.

"White girl right," he said. "Crows; no Blackfeet."

"We shall be in danger from them," said Dan, musingly. "We thought ourselves safe from intrusion here; it seems that others know these passes as well as you, Jeff."

"I didn't think it," said Jeff, looking crestfallen. "Ben said that war more about then I thought for, an' he war right. I ain't sure we orter stay hyar, but now we've got in, don't let us be driv out by nobody."

"Why should you be obstinate?" said the girl. "I have kept your fate away from you longer than you think; I can not aid you much longer."

"Will you alight and eat? We were about to partake of food," said Dan.

"Thank you; I will do so; and I hope, too, before I go, to persuade you that this is no safe place for you."

"I am ready to listen to reason," said Dan, as he assisted her to alight.

"Which means, in plain English, that I am an unreasonable female," said the girl, accepting his hand in alighting. "Do not think so; I am in earnest in my desire to be of service to you."

"I do not doubt it," he said, bringing her near the fire. "Jeff, take care of the lady's horse, if you please. Give me that buffalo skin, Na; now my saddle. There; that is as comfortable a seat as I can give you."

"Thanks again; you are only too kind to one who could aid you, but dare not. Do not put yourself to so great trouble on my account; I do not deserve it."

"Allow me to be judge of that," said Dan. "You are welcome to our camp, and we will do all we can to make your stay here a comfortable one. Our accommodations are not good, but such as they are, they are at your service."

"You are very kind, sir—too kind, indeed. It makes me feel the obligation all the more. Will you add to it by asking one of your men to look at the horse? I am afraid he is badly hurt."

"Let me do it," said Jeff, starting up, hastily. "I'm an

out an' outer with a loss; an' if any thing kin be done for the animile, I'm the boy to do it, you bet. I wish't Ben was hyar; he's the boss feller to take keer of a loss."

"I know him well; and unworthy as I am, the old man idolized me," said the girl, softly. "Do you know that Trapper Bez is my type of an honest man? He is brave to a fault, generous to a fallen foe, and faithful to a friend, even to the death."

"You speak well of him."

"Who speaks ill? All the world does not contain a nobler heart. Rough, to be sure, and rude of speech, but he has a heart which would do credit to a prince. I am sorry he is coming here."

"You are a riddle I can not read," said Dan, quickly. "Your vague warnings, while they may make us uneasy, can not drive us away. I am having rare sport here. Buffalo, deer and bear are the captives of my bow and spear. The men have a good supply of peltries, and when we kill a carcajou I shall be ready to return."

"I hope you may kill one speedily, then," said the girl. "Do you not hear horses' feet?"

"Yes; they come this way."

As he spoke, the coming horsemen rounded the point of rocks and appeared in the valley. They were three in number, and were well armed and appointed. The horses they rode were of the mustang breed, strong-limbed and fleet-footed. Two of the new-comers were ordinary-looking fellows enough, dressed in hunter's garb. But, the man who rode in front was a remarkable person to meet in the backwoods. His frame was robust, and evidently hardened by fatigue and hardships. His face, which was almost featureless in its contour, was browned by exposure to the sun and wind of many climates. He wore no beard, but silky moustaches of the deepest black hung as low as the base of the neck, giving him a brigandish air. His dress was of dark-green cloth, carefully fitted to his person. A belt of black leather was strapped about his waist, and held a beautiful pair of revolvers of the most approved make. His keen, dark eyes surveyed the group at the fire for a moment, and then, signing to his companions to halt, he rode forward alone.

"Good day to all here, gentlemen. Ah, my dear Marian, I am glad to find you safe. Some one saw you go up the pass and directly after three Indians followed you. Were you pursued?"

"Yes. These gentlemen drove back the savages. Did you not meet them in the pass?"

"Doubtless they heard us coming and concealed themselves. My thanks are due these gentlemen for your rescue. Perhaps they will favor me with their names."

"I am called Daniel Crowley," said Dan, acting as spokesman. "The others are trappers and guides. This is Jeff Root, this Nat Adams, this Indian Joe, and this Jim Arnold. Two of our party are absent. Ben Miffin, and a German, Yost Hoppen by name."

"Yost Hoppen?"

"Yes."

"A new-comer in these hills," said the visitor. "At least, I never saw him."

"He has but lately arrived here," said Dan. "He left us somewhat abruptly."

"What sort of a fellow was he?"

Dan described the German. The eyes of the man brightened and he took off his cap and ran his fingers through his hair with a smile. As he did so, they saw that he wore his hair in short curls.

"I know who this is," said he. "Confound his impudence. Do you know who I think it is? He left about the same time with Ben Miffin, did he not?"

"Soon after."

"Then it is Jan Schneider, the Dutch friend of Ben Miffin. They are both tricky customers, but the Dutchman is the worst. And if you would believe me, when he came out on the plains, he was as perfect a specimen of the native Dutchman as you would wish to see."

"We thought him so now," said Dan. "Confound him, I should like to trouble him. — What could have been his object?"

"Pure devilry, and nothing else. People used to practice on him when he came out first, and he likes to return the compliment."

"Haw, haw!" roared Jeff. "You don't tell me the Dutch man fooled us all? Belly for him. He ain't no stretch or he wouldn't be with Ben Miffin, I allow. You ain't told us your name, mister."

"My name. Call me what you will. Any name will do," replied the other.

"Not prezactly so, mister. Dan Crowley has been mighty free with our names. Stands to reason you ought return the compliment. Let's hear."

"I am called Conrad Vesey."

"Never mind what yer called. What's yer name?"

"I have given it."

"All right. Glad to see ye. Them men of yours out thar. Who be they?"

"Never mind that. They are trappers in my employ. Do you often exercise your questioning powers in that manner, Mr. Rooter?"

"Why?"

"I should not think it would pay you. I have seen a great deal of life, and I never knew a man to get very rich or very great by asking questions. I never did, upon my word. For my part, I never answer any more than I think absolutely necessary for my own comfort and well-being."

"Close, ain't ye?" said Jeff.

"Rather," replied Conrad. "Now, Marian, if you are quite rested, I think we had better go."

"I had accepted the invitation of those gentlemen to take some food."

"Do you need it?"

"Certainly I do. I have been riding all day."

"You ride too much for your own good, Miss Maria," said Conrad, with a strange, dark smile, which Dan did not like. "I think we must leave you some food."

"I will go now, Conrad," said the girl, quickly. "Gentlemen, I thank you for what you have done. Is my horse fit to go, Mr. Rooter?"

"Course he is. He ain't hurt a bit. He got a gravel stone in his foot. I took it out, an' he's all right. He ain't go."

"Thank you, Mr. Rooter."

Dan advanced to assist her into the saddle. But Conrad leaped to the ground and thrust himself between them in a manner almost unbecomingly heroic.

"Excuse me," he said. "No man touches her hand but I. Allow me to aid you, Marian."

"You presume almost too much upon my good-nature, Conrad Vercy. Mr. Crowley, may I ask your aid in mounting?"

Dan again came forward, and helped her to the saddle. The other man stood by, looking savagely at the young gentleman. His color came and went in wild flashes, and his eyes looked like burning coals. She saw his anger and looked at him with a glance as high as his own.

"You know that I will make this a bitter thing to you, my dear girl," he said, laughing in a short, forced way.

"I know that you have the power, Conrad Vercy. I know my power too."

"None so well as you. But no one knows your power to make me for good or evil better than yourself. Beware of the course you take."

"Are you ready, sir?" she said.

"If you are."

"Then mount and I will follow. I have a few words to say to these gentlemen, and beg you to ride on. I will not detain you five minutes."

"I will not do it."

"You heard the lady request you to ride on," said Crowley, laying his hand upon the arm of the other. "Do as she bids you."

"And who gave you the power to command me?" said Conrad, throwing off his hat. "By the life of my body, you are told. Men have died before now, for half that you have done to me."

"I tell you to go and let the lady speak," said Dan, whose blood was thoroughly up.

"And if I do not go?"

"I will compel you to do it."

Conrad, never removing his eye from the face of the speaker, thrust his hand into the breast of his coat and drew forth a silver eagle, which he made a movement to raise to

his lips. At the sight of the bugle, Maid Marian sprang from the saddle and seized him by the arm. He shook her off.

"Do not sound, Conrad. I pray you by every thing holy and pure which you once knew, by your patron saint, by the holy cross, by the name of your mother, do not sound."

"I will. It is better to make an end of this at once. I have borne enough, and more than enough already. No man shall come and play Fernando to your Miranda, while I have the unpleasant rôle of Caliban. Let me alone. I will stand the call."

"You shall not."

"Then beg my pardon for the insult you have offered me but now."

"I was wrong, Conrad. I acknowledge it. See. I have dismounted. If you are ready, so am I. You may put me into the saddle."

He passed his arm about her waist, raised her from the ground, and placed her lightly in the saddle, with a glance of triumph at Dan. Then the party rode away together, without a word of farewell on her part.

"The durned hound," growled Jeff. "I'd like to put a bullet right through his p'izon karkidge. What did he come from?"

"How can I tell?" said Dan. "What power has he over that sweet girl?"

"It beats me. He's a 'tarnal critter. He ought to be skulped," said Jim.

"Yer mighty right," said a voice close at hand.

"Yaw!" cried another.

CHAPTER VII.

IN PERIL.

THEY turned at the sound, and saw Ben M flin standing near, with a smile upon his face, and, close beside him, the man they had known as Yost Hoppen.

"You are here, Ben. I am glad you have come. As for the person with you, I shall need some explanation of his contact before I will consent to receive him among us," said Daniel.

"Very goot," said the German. "Vat you say mit me?"

"Did you give me your right name when we had you in the camp?"

"Nein," replied the other, with a broad grin. "My name ish Jan Schneider."

"Very well. What was your motive in trying to deceive us in that manner?"

"Yest vor vam," said Jan. "Penn dells me to co unt git lat to the camp unt vind out who you vas. I cooms auver here, unt town py der rifler I makes believe I vash asleep. I neier pees asleep at all; I vas in fun."

"You did not deceive us entirely; I suspected that you knew more than you showed upon the surface, and so did Jeff. You had no sinister motive, then?"

"I does vat Penn dells me," said Jan. "Now I dells you: I peen mit Penn more ash fiviff year. He goot mans; he help me goot many dimes ven I peen in trouble. He save me ven der Injan come, he save me vrom der vasser, he save me fr in der vells, he bolls me out vrom der mut ven Shales Tamant leaves me dere; unt ven he says 'Do dis,' I does it, yoos ash he says."

"That's the way of it," said Ben. "Don't you bother Jan. He's a good feller, an' will stand by you ez long ez I do. I set him on you myself an' he did jost ez I told him. If I quit ye, so will he. I've tried to make the durned Dutchman understand that I ain't wuth a cent, but he won't believe it; he's so set in

his way, the contrary cuss. Don't say no more 'bout it. When you talk of me, you must count in Jan along with me, for I ain't got rid of him, an' I don't know ez I want to."

"Dat ish true, vat he says," said Jan. "I never hear him vile I lifs; he too goot to me."

"Let that go. Ye've had visitors, I allow," continued Ben.

"Yes; did you see them?"

"But yer life I did: I was out in the bushes, an' seen the two of 'em: an' ez true ez you live an' breathe, I thort y'd get yer grade when ye put the gal on the loss. Ye don't know the p'izon serpent ez well ez I do."

"To whom do you refer?" The man called Conrad Vesey?"

"You bet; though he ain't got no more claim to that name than many another; he goes by a dozen; the Blackbird call him the Sweeping Eagle; I know hisself Conrad Vesey; his true name is Will Markham, an' a more p'izon snake than't to be found on the prary. I know him. Some call him Will the Wisp."

"Who and what is he?"

"He's a man that gets his money by robbin' free trappers. When he kin do it without a shot he does that; but if there's any danger in leavin' 'em alive he kills 'em, then they may ez well count themselves dead an' be so. He don't make no more account of takin' a life of a man than I do of skinnin' a beaver. The blood on his hands is enough to sink an honest man; but he ain't got a grain of honesty in his dirty knuckle. I never hear me the molder accuse he's got it in him to be a good man. He's got a lean, scame face, an' a quick an' bright eye. The world afore him to make a honest livin', but he won't. I wouldn't like to say how rich he's got. He's got an outfit in every little town along the river, to get rid of the pelts he steals, an' to change him in piles of money."

"Do you mean to tell me that the fellow lives entirely by robbery and murder?"

"Course he does. It ain't no trick at all he takes; all's fish that comes to his net: guns, clothes, ammunition, traps, any thing. He hardly ever takes a camp until they're about to break up; that's his natural gift, you see. He lays back

till all the work is done, an' then he gobbles up the huh party. Darn his picket, he stole a lot of polls from me one't upon a time, an' ef I git a chance at him I'll fix his dint eternally. I had half a mind to pull on him while he stood thar; ef it hadn't 'a' been for the gal I'd 'a' done it."

"Who is she?"

"She's got a strange history, hez that gal; she war found warrin' about in the snow on the prary down thar, a gal about eight year old; she's nigh onto seventeen now, though she's got the courage of a man. Conrad Vesey found her, an' he brung her up. He's a man of fast rate education, an' he taught her every thing. She's apt to larn, an' so it needn't surprise ye that she knows so much. It was his kindness in takin' care of her that established a sort of claim on her."

"I see," said Dan; "and on the strength of this he has obtained a power over her. She is a noble girl."

"She's all that. She don't know the half his deviltries, though she knows he's bad enuff. I've he'rn her beg of him to quit this life, an' better some honorable imployment; but he won't; robbin' an' murder is jist his strong suit, you understand, an' he ain't goin' to quit it jist yit. He ain't rich enuff to suit him, though I can't see what he wants with any more. He hankers arter it."

"And this beautiful woman must pass her life in the society of such a man as that?" cried Dan. "It is horrible. Can nothing be done?"

"She would call it desertin' a friend to leave him now. He found her perishin', an' took keer on her. She never knew how she cam on the prary. I opine she was one of a party of immigrants, an' got strayed away somehow, or else the rest of the party got cut up, an' she ran away. 'Tain't nothin' rare. But whoever she is, a braver gal don't live on the earth, or a kinder one. Gosh! ain't she han'som?"

"She is indeed."

"She tries her best to save people; that's how the story of the White Spirit got about. She's usen to come by night an' try to warn men ar'in' campin' byaraboots. A many of 'em take warnin' an' quit. She wouldn't 'a' come to ye ag'in ef ye hadn't helped her out of the hands of Jeff Reoter. Don't ye tech her ag'in, Jeff, or I'll be in yer wool."

"I ain't goin' ter," grumbled Jeff. "I didn't see any better way; an' I say yit, thet ef we had her, Vesey wouldn't dare to strike at us."

"She shain't be hurted. I like the gal; she's been mighty kind to the old man. She told ye ~~some~~ sassy 'bout my savin' her life. 'Twan't me; 'twas Jan. Don't you deny it; ef ye do, thar ain't nobody hyar is goin' to believe ye."

"Don't you go to lie on yourself, Pein Miller," roared Jan. "You s'pose der young lady ton't know who saved her? I tells you vat it is: off you dink you can put every ting off on me, den I lets you know ash I vill not stand it. You sales der frankin yourself: now den."

"I'll leave it out to the comp'ny," said Ben. "She'll get into the track of a herd of buffler, an' Jan an' me see them a-comin'. We rode down to see the fun, an' while I took the bridle of her horse an' led him away, Jan shot a mad bull thet was comin' at us full tilt."

"Liar! liar!" shouted Jan. "You runs right in der herd of buffaloes, unt dakes der girl out; off course I shoots der pull. I shoots any pull ash dries to pett me."

"I have no doubt you did good service, both of you," said Dan. "The young lady spoke of it; but how is it thut she can live among this party of rough and brutal men? For I take it thut this scoundrel must have a large party with him."

"You bet. The roughs an' villains of the North-west jine him. He's got a camp in one of the valleys north of this, an' thar they camp. Don't think thar ain't no women thar. Most of the men hez got wives of the'r own. Thar's every nation under the sun in that gang. A story could be writ about 'em. They've built up a village, an' thar they live. They ar' great chums with the Blackfoot, an' this Mahan is the title of chief. When Whirling Breeze—that's a Blackfoot chief—ain't strong enough to do any job, he calls on Mahan to help him."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; an' ef you was to show fildt lyar, why, ten to one he calls in Whirling Breeze to help him. It ain't no ten to one he don't dew it anyhow, 'cause he will kill ef he can, an' he'll want to say it to the Blackfoot, 'cause the gal likes you, don't you see?"

"Do you think we are in danger of an attack?" said Dan.

"I should rather guess you *was*; no man ever insulted Will Markman yet, that didn't git the worst of it. No, sirree! He'll be down on you like bricks. Bet yer life. He holds a grudge forever an' a day. I don't think I sh'd be above the soul of the gal ha'n't stood my friend. By the same token, I'd 'a' put a ball through his hide long ago, ef it hadn't been for *her*. So I guess we ar' nigh 'bout even."

"This is the strangest tale I ever heard. Why do not the trappers unite and put these scoundrels down?"

"They tried that onc't. But the brigade had hardly got together when the cusses vamosed the ranche. When we got to the place we couldn't find hide nor hair of them. We hankered round the place a week but it wasn't no use; they wouldn't come back. An' when we commenced to scatter they jist give us tar. We lost a good many of our boys that trip. That's the'r best hold; cut an' come ag'in."

"Do you expect an attack soon?"

"Kain't say. We must git ready fer it. I know them. I've got a place up hyar a bit we kin fortyty. We'll do it too, an' then let 'em come. That's enough talk. Jan, give us a song. An' ef anybody hyar hez got a flask of whisky, let him pass it over. I'm awful dry after so much talkin'."

"Vat I sings?" asked Jan.

"Any thing. I ain't particular. Now you keep still, all of you. That's whisky is it? Here's yer health."

Ben took the flask which Dan passed to him, and elevated the bottom at an angle of forty-five degrees. A musical gurgle followed.

Jan, who was about to commence his song, paused in the act and looked at Ben.

"Is dat visky, Penn?" he said.

"The best you ever see," said Ben, applying the mouth of the flask to his own, and sucking vigorously.

"I ton't pe-leave ash dat ish visky," said Jan. "I nefer pe-leave any t'ings unless I taste him."

"Take some," said Dan. "You are welcome, and perhaps you can sing the better if you have a drink."

"Yaw, I sings petter," said Jan, eagerly. "Speak to Penn. **He drinks him all.**"

Jeff Rooter seized the flask and drew it from the reluctant hand of the other, and passed it over to Jan. He took a hearty drink, drew a long breath and winked at Ben.

"'Tis visky, sure," he said. "I have some more."

But Jeff, who had been anxiously waiting, snatched the bottle from his hand. By the time it had gone the room is there was a great vacuum in the upper part of the flask.

"Now the song," said Ben. "We ar' ready. Don't keep us waitin', yer."

Jan straightened up, and began to sing in English, with his irrepressible Dutch accent, which set the whole camp in a roar.

The song being finished, every one clapped the infectious German on the back and entreated him to give them another. But he was not to be coaxed.

"I sing no more now. Blanty song I got; sometimes I sings, other times I not sing. Penn can sing no more ash von vrog. Pat der young man can sing. He got singing face."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Dan.

"Vy, you can tell by der face of a man can sing. Auvery Doechman sings. It is yout standard ash preething vor a Doechmans to sing. Pat der is not all. Day know sometimes vat day sings. Pat a Yahnke sing not vor nothing unless he be trained good vor. Now yout der young men them us sing not a song, but den I sings another vor."

In order to get another song from him, Dan began a sentimental ballad, to which the German listened with great pleasure, for Dan had a very sweet and true voice, and the chorus awoke pleasant remembrances of songs in which he had joined with old companions beside the Rhine River. When Dan had finished, Jan sang a German melody: "Where is the German fatherland?"

It was something so touching, so full of nobly yearning for the dear old land, so far away, that every man in the company began to lift the Dutchman higher, as a man who could cling to his love of country in a foreign land.

"That's something like it, old man," said Ben. "Thank ye, I've proved ye, old man. I know what ye ar'. Dead or alive, we are always friends."

The two clasped hands across the fire. Their hard, brown faces were a little troubled. They had fought and worked side by side through many a weary year, and knew each other well.

"Yes, Penn. The Doochman you pick oop in der peer saloon in St. Louis vill stand by you, coom vat vill."

"That's right, boys," said Dan. "Now, if you are ready, we will see this place which you think will do to fortify, Ben."

The trapper rose and led the way up the stream. Every one else followed. They kept on for half a mile and reached a place where the stream widened and ran in two channels, leaving an island in the center—a rugged, irregular little place covered with rocks and loose slate.

"Why," said Dan, "we can make a fortress of that."

"That's what I thort," said Ben, quietly. "We kin try it, anyhow."

CHAPTER VIII.

LOOK SHARP!

THEY set to work in good earnest. Before three days had passed they had finished their fortification. It extended round three sides of the little place. In the rear rose the high barrier of the mountain range, vast and high. The fortification they had built crossed the narrow pass in front at a place where, defended by three or four resolute men, an army might have been kept at bay. Down the mountain it was almost impossible for enemies to come, for human feet had never trod that place. Dan looked with considerable admiration at the work, when finished.

"'Tis nice," said Ben. "I'm a dab at buildin' forts, I reckon. I've helped to build many a one in my time. So's Jan."

"Yaw," said Jan. "I helps Penn always."

"So ye hev, old boy. But the time has come to show what's in ye now, ef ever. We shan't be left alone much

longer. I'm goin' out on a scout. You'd better come with me. The rest of ye stand to yer arms, an' ef ye hear my rife, then look out for danger."

The two scouts shouldered their rifles and marched away. They took a course down the mountain side. They had not gone half a mile when the thunder of coming hoofs caused them to look up, and they saw Mail Marian coming toward them at a hard gallop. She drew up the pattering squad close beside them and asked, eagerly:

"Where are they?"

"I don't reckon I orter tell ye, my beauty," said Ben. "Yer in the sarvice of the in'my."

"Not wilkily, Ben. You know that if I remain with them, it is because I believe that I can do good. And Corral is not so wicked when I am kind to him. I am under obligations to that man. He took me up, a little homeless, homeless wanderer, and gave me a welcome and a home. Since that time he has taught me, loved me, taught me, and sought in every way to put me under obligations to him. He has done it. I can not repay him by ingratitude."

"But you know what he is," said Ben.

"True. I know he does wicked things. Crimes at which the heart grows sick are on his soul. I have saved many, but my time is nearly past. They are coming, and woe to these men in the camp. Turn back and warn them."

"And is 'Will o' the Wisp' coming? Now may the black curse fall on him and all his villainous crew. Jan, turn back. 'Tain't no use to go on any farther, ez I see. But ef you see 'Will o' the Wisp,' tell him this from me. I've had a bullet molled for him this many a long day. I've got it now. An' ez sure ez he gives me a shot at him, I'll be sure I rub him out. He knows whether I like him, his ownself."

"Here they come," cried Mail Marian. "Away!"

A confused trampling of hoofs was heard on the mountain path, and the next moment the riders began to troop into the valley. They raised wild shouts of triumph at the sight of the two scouts and rushed to seize them. But Ben Millin was not the man to be taken ready. Snatching to Jan to follow, he dashed into an irregular path up the

mountain side, known to but few. Before the horsemen had reached the spot where they had stood, they were half-way up the steep. Here they made a stand, and their enemies, rough and savage as they were, dared not follow.

"Vy you no cooms oop here?" shouted Jan. "Yoost try it vance. Ve makes you veel pad off you do."

The wild band gathered at the mountain foot. Truly, as Ben had said, they were a motley group. There was hardly a nation under the sun unrepresented here. Indian, Negro, French, German, Spaniard, English, and half-breed rode round the mountain-base, and shouted uncouth oaths at the two men perched upon the mountain side, laughing at them.

"Who is it?" said Conrad, riding up at this moment. "Jasper Verton, do you know them?"

The man addressed as Jasper Verton was a pale-faced, slight youth, who looked as if he had but lately left a college. Yet he was the most deliberate villain in the band, and was the second of "Will o' the Wisp" in his villainies.

"I know them very well," said Verton. "That scoundrel Milten and his Dutchman. I think it would be better not to come in my way when I attempt to finish a fellow again. He would have been a dead man but for you."

"Marian took his part."

"So. And when Marian takes the part of any one it is understood that they are safe. Shall we follow these rascals? They are laughing at us."

"Follow the devil! How old Ben Milfin would laugh to see us dismount and begin to clamber up the rocks. They would kill us off, two at a time, before we could reach them. No. Let us on about the duty we have to perform. It will be all the easier that they are not of the party."

"Pop Milfin gave me a message for you, Conrad Vesey," said Marian.

"And what was it?"

"'Say to Will o' the Wisp,' he said, 'that I have a bullet run for him, and if he gives me a shot at him I mean to rub him out.'"

A slight paleness showed itself in the face of the listener, but was gone in a moment. "The rogue dares to threaten me, then? I will make him sorry for that before many days."

Forward, boys. There is much spoil in the camp of the enemy, and it is ours."

Marian accompanied the band, and they rode into the deserted camp. On every side they saw evidences of a hasty departure. Broken traps were scattered here and there, tinkering-cups battered out of shape, pieces of harness and straps, and a number of condemned skins of many kinds. But the birds had flitted.

"This is your work," said the leader, in a hoarse whisper, turning to Marian. "You have warned them to go away."

"Not I," said Marian. "At least not since the day you saw me here."

"I believe you lie."

"Lie!"

"I beg your pardon, Marian. I should not have said that. But you annoy me beyond description. I can not bear it. Now these people are gone, and who is to blame?"

"Maid Marian generally has her way in the end," sneered Verton. "She said you should do these people no wrong. Conrad, a word in your ear."

"No. I wish to speak with him," said Marian.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Marian, but what I have to say is of interest to the whole band. It will take me but a moment. Now, Conrad."

The two went aside together. Verton's face looked like that of Iago in conference with one of his fools.

"If you remember rightly," said he, "there is a young fellow among these hunters who is a handsome gallant, suited to a maiden's eye. What if I were to tell you that it is for his sake she wishes to save these people?"

"It may be," said Conrad, beginning to flush. "She showed him great favor when I saw her here."

"Certainly. He knows the ways of the world and how to talk to an unsuspecting forest maid like this. His education is superior, and he is one of those trim young fellows who can take a woman's eye. Now you are rather a good-looking fellow, Conrad, but there is a little too much of the country about you, and she has lived long enough here to know you exactly as you are. And you don't think that your life is the most enticing in the world."

"Is that what you called me here to say?" said Conrad.

"Not at all. I called you here to inform you that the girl loves this Yankee fellow. I do not think she knows her own heart yet. But, I have read human nature too long and too deeply to be deceived in this. I tell you she loves him."

"If I thought that," began Conrad, laying his hand upon a knife, "as God is my judge I think I would kill her."

"None of that," said Verton. "None of the band would see you do Maid Marian an injury. Revenge yourself upon the man if you like, but do not touch the girl."

"What is that to you?" said Conrad, fiercely, half drawing the blade.

"Do not think to frighten me, Conrad Vesey. You ought to know me by this time. You shall not hurt the girl."

"Hurt her. As if I could! I tell you my life is bound up in hers. But why need it trouble you? Do you want her yourself?"

The sudden question startled Verton, and nearly threw him off his balance, for he was conscious of this thought when the question was put. His first slight confusion over, he turned it off with a light laugh of derision.

"I! You know well enough that Maria would murder me if I dared to look at another woman. I meant this for a warning. Watch this young scoundrel well, for I believe he seeks to rob us of Maid Marian."

"The bare idea is enough; he may count himself a dead man, if I penetrate the camp myself and kill him. Let the men of the camp here. Pick out eight or ten of the best scouts and search for the trail. I will go out alone and look for it. See that Marian does not leave the camp."

"If she will go, I do not think I can stop her," said Verton.

"Let me speak a word with her before I go. If you find the trail, fire three guns; that will bring me back. Send Marian to me."

The girl came to him with downcast eyes. She did not know what he had to say, but partly guessed it.

"Marian," he said, "I am going to look for the camp of the hunters. Be assured that I shall find it. If I do, it remains with you to say what shall be the fate of its occupants."

"With me?"

"With you. It is a long time since I saw you first. You were a winning creature then, and I felt a thrill in a heart long dead to human sympathy, as I lifted you to the saddle before me and pressed you to my breast. I have seen you grow up like a flower; I have taught you, and seen your mind expand; my love has grown up with you, and I will be set at rest. You complain of the life I lead."

"Yes, Conrad," she said, in a subdued tone, "I do."

"And you have good reason. I am willing to change this life, to sever forever from these wild associates, and go out into the world. I have wealth enough to make me welcome among men, for money, after all, is the power which moves the world."

"Ah, Conrad, if you would make this change?"

"Would you go with me?"

"Yes, Conrad."

"As my wife, I mean."

"No, no, no! as your sister. I love you in that way; I never can love you in any other. I will go with you to the world's end as your sister. I will love you always, but I can not marry you."

He staggered like a man half drunk, and leaned against his horse for support. It was a rough awakening from a long life-dream. All his hopes were scattered in a moment by those sad words.

"You do not love me then?"

"I am grateful to you, Conrad. You took me when a little child and made me what I am. In the midst of wickedness, and doing it yourself, you taught me nothing but that which was good and pure. All that I am I owe to you. But I can not forget what you have been."

"I can change."

"Can you blot out the past? Can you make me forget how you acquired the wealth of which you boast? Conrad, let us go out together, with no wealth except our hands and our brains, give up this ill-gotten booty to the poor, and make ourselves a new name on earth."

"Think what you do, Marian. This has been the hope of my life. For you I have toiled; for you I have sometimes even

stained my hands with blood. This gold—what did I care for it, except that you would some time share it with me. As for the world, this life is preferable, for the world so wronged me before I fled to the wilderness that I swore an oath to be revenged upon it. Change your purpose; say that you will be my wife."

"I can not do that."

"Then give me your reasons."

"I have given them."

"Then I will add another. This airy hunter, who saved your life, and who took you out of the hands of Jeff Rooter, has a warmer place in your heart than I have."

"At least, he never insulted me," said Marian, angrily.

"Indeed! Verton was right, then."

"Verton is a villain; I have told you again and again not to trust him; he will do you some great wrong yet."

"No fear of that."

"He will betray you; I know that he is a villain to the heart's core. He has lied about me, it seems."

"I think not. But let us say no more of this. I swear never to rest until this dandy hunter is in my power; and when he is—"

The expression of his face told the probable fate of Dan, if by any chance he fell into his enemy's hands. He flung himself into the saddle and rode away. At length he reached a place where a path mounted the side of the hill; there he tied his horse, and looking at the pistols in his belt, he saw that they were capped. His knife was in its sheath, and the hilt of a long-bladed stiletto showed itself in the breast of his hunting-shirt. The path up which he climbed was an irregular one, and dangerous to unwary feet. But, he had suspected the place to which the party of hunters had gone, and knew that he could approach it in this way without being seen. He had just drawn himself up to a platform of rock from which he had a view of the camp, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder and a voice said:

"What do you want here?"

He started to his feet. Dan Crowley, the man he had hated from his soul, stood before him. At first his hand fell upon his knife, and then he mastered himself with an effort.

" Ah, it is you, sir," he said. " You startled me at first."

" You have not answered my question," repeated Dan. " I asked you what you wanted here."

" I might ask you the same."

" Certainly—you might ; and I might give you an honest answer. But as my question came first, be so good as to answer it at once."

" 'Scuth ! I have as much right here as you—a better, in fact."

" That is no answer to my question."

" Then my answer is, attend to your own affairs and let me attend to mine."

" That is speaking to the point ; but, happily, I am attending to my business. Scoundrel, I know you ! Thief, robber and murderer ; consort of Indians and horse-thieves, you are in bad hands. Surrender, you disgrace to humanity ! surrender, and thank my good-nature that I did not cut you down without question."

" I am glad this has come so soon," hissed Conrad, snatching a pistol from his belt and cocking it with his thumb. In his hurry, the cap fell from the tube. Before he could get at the other pistol, Dan got in a blow with his left hand, which sent the rascal staggering. It was only for a moment, and then they closed.

If Dan Crowley had calculated upon an easy victory over Conrad Vesey, he reckoned without his host. The moment he felt the grip of that strong arm about his waist, he knew there would be a fight for it. Each had got a knife out, but the knife-hand of each was inclosed in the grip of the other, and in this position they struggled for the throw. Dan, an adept in every sort of violent exercise in the States, rarely had met his equal at wrestling. But Conrad was fully his match. Up and down the flat rock they tramped, their eyes glowing, their teeth clenched, and their breathing short and quick. Neither of them saw that Ben Miller and Jan had come down the mountain side and were interested spectators of the struggle.

" I have you," said Dan.

" Wait," said Vesey. " You must win me before you wear me."

"I will do it soon."

"Then you must struggle for it," said Vesey. "I will make you rue the day you wrestled with me."

"You don't know me, Will o' the Wisp," replied Dan, putting forth all his powers. "Look out for yourself."

They were well matched, but Dan, in making a feint, caught his foot in a projecting point of rock and staggered. Conrad threw his body forward to finish the struggle, but, by a dextrous slight, Dan turned him as they fell, and came down uppermost.

"Good boy," shouted Ben. "That's right; stick the condemned critter. Stick him, Dan!"

But the wrist of Crowley's right hand was still encircled by the iron hand of Conrad.

"You have set your ruffians on me, coward," he hissed. **"I'll die game."**

"Rise," said Dan, freeing himself by an effort. "I take no unfair advantage."

Conrad was on his feet in a moment, and raising the knife above his head, made a tiger-like bound, and would have buried the steel in the unprotected bosom of his antagonist. The blow fell. But, Ben Miffin's hand and eye never failed, and the knife was shivered into pieces against the silver-bound stock of the rifle, which he thrust between them. Then, whirling the rifle over his head, he knocked the ruffian senseless.

"That he is, the condemned critter," he said. "Not the kind of an animal a man would like to meet without weapons. I'd like to finish the dirty hound."

"I hopes he deat," said Jan.

"I hope not," said Dan. "Thank you for your timely aid Ben? It saved my life."

"I wouldn't 'a' chanced spilin' this yer rifle only for that," said Ben; "I hold it to be a sin to strike at one of God's creatures without just cause. This yer thing deserved worse than that. If he comes to life, an' you an' he hez a turn-up agin, stick! Stick hard an' deep, for he never will give you the second chance if he gits ye down. I kain't make it out. 'Tain't often a trapper holds a grudge agin' another for nothin'. He seems to hate you without reason."

"I dells you," said Jan; "it vas all pecause of der young fraulein."

"The gal?"

"Yaw."

"The Dutchman is right, Dan. Blame my cats ef he ain't. Now don't thet beat all natur'? 'Tain't right; 'tain't Christian. Now an Injun, ef ye hurt him, allers remend as it, till he lez yer skulp. But durn a white man that harbors such a sperrit. Don't say nothin' to him. Only keep cool, an' ef it comes to blows ag'in, give him tar."

"He yoost like Shules Tamant," said Jan.

"Yes; an' Jules was a good chap till the Blackfeet cum. That reminds me that I expect Whirling Broze out this way soon. He's a Blackfoot that don't owe me any good will. I helped t'ar his company all to shivers ere day. He an' this devil hunt in couples; an' he's the likeliest man of the two."

"What shall we do with this man?"

"Keep him; he'll be a hostage for the good conduct of the rest. Ef they come at us, we'll put him out in front of the stockade an' let him feel the bullets first. Give me that thar lariat, Jan."

The Dutchman obeyed, and he cut it into three pieces. One of these he tied about the arms of their captive near the elbows. The second about his waist, to drive him by, and the third was kept for his feet when they reached the camp.

"Git up," said he; "don't fool; you ain't hurt so bad but you kin stand."

"Will o' the Wisp" rose, sullenly. "What do you intend to do with me?" he said.

"You ar' my pris'ner," said Ben. "I'm j'uss you mean some devilment. I won't be sure, but that is what I think. 'Tennyrate, I've got ye, an' I mean to keep ye safe. Keep an' eye on him, Jan, an' ef he goes to stir, shoot him through the head."

"I vatch him like von cat," said Jan; "I no let him fool me."

"That's right. Don't. Now git on, you. Down that path."

Ben took the loose end of the lariat fastened about the waist

of the captive and drove him before him down the slope toward the camp. The inmates hailed their coming with wild shouts as they saw the captive. At the same moment Joe, who was on guard, shouted to some one who was coming to halt.

"I must come," replied a sweet voice, which Dan knew well. Joe stood aside, and at the same moment the beautiful horse of Maid Marian cleared the low breastwork at a bound and stood before them. She started as she saw their prisoner and beckoned to Dan to come to her.

"What has he done?" she said.

"He attempted my life and we took him."

"Do you mean to harm him?"

"Not unless he attempts to escape."

"You took him in good time. The entire band are here, a hundred men in all; and they are searching high and low for you. I see you are prepared."

"They will have to fight for us," said Dan.

"Brave, but too rash. If they can not take you in that way, they can besiege you, and starve you out. Or they can call in three hundred Indians to aid them. Whirling Breeze and a large company of his braves will be here to-morrow. I pray you, if escape is possible to attempt it."

"How is it possible? No doubt they hold all the passes."

"You should have taken my advice before," she said; "I meant it honestly, and for your good. I come now to warn you to summon all your fortitude, and to fight bravely against the enemy, and save yourself if you can. I would ask you to surrender, but I fear you would not do that."

"You judge us rightly. What chance would we have of life if we yielded unless we join this band of professional murderers?"

"There is something else," she said, in a slightly tremulous voice. "I know my actions may, nay, must seem unwomanly—"

"To me?"

"You would of course deny it. I would have you and all here judge me as leniently as you can. I was not born for this. To be a companion of savage men, without the pale of society, fugitives from justice, with the ban of the law upon

their guilty heads. But blind fortune has made me what I am, and I can not break the tie which binds me to them."

"Lady, will you hear me?"

"Let me finish. I am bound by a tie of gratitude to your man. I never knew until lately what he is. I did not believe it possible, for, savage as he is to his enemies, he is gentle to me."

"Are you his wife, lady?"

"His wife? No, no; never that tie. I have not time to tell you now. It is enough that my fortunes are linked with his, and I can not forsake him. If I could turn him from this wicked life, it seems to me I would be willing to die. But good-bye. We may never meet again on earth, but I shall not forget you."

"Lady—"

"My name is Marian Delisle. Call me by my first name. I am Maid Marian to all the band."

"And Maid Marian of Sherwood Forest was not fairer than she of the Black Hills," said Dan.

"A truce. If I am Maid Marian, your man is no Robin Hood, nor are his followers such men as I find in merry Sherwood. You see I know the history of the warriors to whom you would compare us. Let that pass. I must bid you good-bye."

"But not forever," cried Dan. "I will find you and know you better."

"No. Never, never more! Think of me at my best. When you are gone from this, think sometimes of the poor girl who would have been a better woman, if fate had not been too strong for her."

He would have detained her, but she turned her horse's head, and put him over the breastwork again. In turning she had dropped a small dagger, which he snatched from the ground and put into his bosom. As he rose he saw the bright eyes of the prisoner fixed upon him in speechless indignity.

"Come here," he said.

Dan walked slowly to his side.

"Give up the dagger. Curse you, do you think you can keep any thing that belongs to her? I will have it, if you hide it in your heart, for there I will dig for it."

"Come, no heroics," said Dan. "I do not propose to give up the weapon. It is all I have as a remembrance of a woman whom you keep with you only by the strength of gratitude. You do not suppose she will fall in love with your character?"

"Give up the dagger, I say. Fool, coward, coward, liar! Under my hands, and let me put it out here, in the midst of your hired bellies, and I will put you where you will never stir up the heart of a foolish girl again. You devil! You know you have me fast, but the time may come."

"Silence, sir. I am not fool enough to fight you. We have you safe. The time for dueling has gone by."

"Yes; with cowards."

"The day may come when you will find whether I am a coward or not, sir. It does not matter. In the mean time, keep a civil tongue in your head, or you may chance to suffer by it. If you disturb the camp I will have you gagged."

"Dan," said Ben, "come hyar."

The old trigger was standing on a point of rocks from which they had a view of the valley below. Dan hurried to his side. They could see the entire band gathered upon the plain, at the mouth of the pass, in conference. Just then Maid Marian joined them.

"They hev found us," said Ben.

"So it seems. Ha! Do you see there?"

He pointed to the south. And there, filling into the valley, they saw a band of warriors, larger than the force of white men on the plain. The reinforcement had come ahead of time.

"Whew!" said Ben. "That's Whirling Breeze. Now we ar' in for it. Look out for noble to-day."

"Do you think they will attack us?"

"You bet. They won't do nothin' else. Eternal grating, look at them Blackbeard! How many more? Swear to graduation if I don't think there's nigh two hundred of them."

The two parties met and exchanged greetings. These were hardly over when Verten detached himself from the company, with a white flag in his hand, and came up the pass. Ben at once left his elevated position, and taking his rifle, called to Dan to accompany him, and ran down to the

first barricade to meet the envoy. When Verton came in view, Ben was sitting on the top of the barricade, in the most nonchalant manner possible, with his rifle across his knees, smoking a pipe.

"Hello, you thar," said Ben, in rather a cavalier manner. "What ar' you arter?"

"We claim this ground."

"Go to Halifax. An' ef Halifax ain't warm enough, go to the devil's kitchen an' make his broth for him."

"You old ruffian, we did not come here to parley and bicker words with you. As leader of the Free Rangers I demand that you yield every thing in your camp—traps, guns, ammunition, pelts, and the like. You will be regarded as prisoners of war, and your lives spared."

"You don't tell me! S'pose we ain't cild to the task of throwin' ourselves away that fashion? What then?"

"We shall come and take you. If we do, and you kill any of our men, you need expect no quarter."

"Dew tell! You'll come in yer best clothes, I s'pose, 'ca'se yer a captin, now that we've got the red coat here as a guest? When will ye give us a call?"

"In a half-hour's time, you old fool, if you don't yield!"

"Jess so! jess so! Mister Brigadier. Bring yer fiddle along; do, fur yer capt'in that used to be may want to dance a jig in the air."

"What do you mean?"

"He means," said Dan, stepping to Ben's side, "that we shall put a rope around your captain's neck and string him up on the first sign of your attempt to force an entrance to our camp."

"Is your name Crowley?"

"Yes."

"Then I have a message for you. You have seen Miss Marian. She says that while in the camp she dropped a cornelian ring, with a heart for a crest. I take it that you have the ring upon your little finger."

Dan drew off the ring. "Give it to the lady, with my compliments," said he. Verton went away.

"That was your own ring," said Ben, in some surprise. "She didn't lose no ring."

"No," said Dan. "She has my ring; I have her dagger."

"Good enough, an' ef you hev yer way, it will have her as well. I kin see that in your face."

Dan smiled, and the old man answered by a broad grin, as he hurried back to the camp and returned directly, accompanied by his prisoner and Jan, who brought his rifle and ammunition.

Ben took a heavy hatchet in his hand and climbed a small tree which grew up close to the barricade. Once in the tree, he lopped off the twigs from a strong branch, leaving it in full view of the enemy as they came up the pass.

"Make a running noose in that lariat an' put it over that devil's head, Jan," said he.

Jan obeyed without a word.

"Now, toss it up hyar."

Jan did as directed. Up to this time Conrad had not spoken a word; but, as the rope was passed over the bough, he understood his danger.

"What are you going to do?" he gasped, beginning to be frightened.

"I reckon we are going to hang you ef yer friends down thar pitch into us. Ketch the end of this lariat, Dan."

When this was done, Ben dropped from his perch, and lifted the prisoner to the top of the barricade.

The long, several horsemen appeared in the pass. Beholding the perilous position of the captain, they paused and uttered various exclamations.

"What do ye mean?" shouted one of the horsemen. "Let the capt'n down ef ye want to live."

"We won't let him down, Tommy Turtle," cried Ben. "An' look you: you go back, every mother's son of you, or I'd push him off the barricade. Now git! Don't stay too long."

"But I want to talk with you, Ben," said Tommy Turtle. "We don't mean you no harm; but we don't want the capt'n hurt neither. We ar' too fond of him. Thar ain't a man in yer party we've got any thing ag'in', unless it most be one. The rest shan't be hurt. Ain't that so, Lieutenant Verton?"

"Certainly; no one shall be injured except that fellow Crowley."

"They are not ag'in' you, Dan," whispered Ben. "It's got to be a fight, sooner or later, for they have a great likin' for this skunk we've got yer, cuss him."

"I do not know why they hate me," said Dan.

"Because the capt'in hates ye. Verton hates us too, but I don't believe it. Come, Tommy," he continued, raising his voice, "that cock won't fight. We know you too well, we do. One't you git us into yer hands, ye've got to let us out, an' would forgit all 'bout what you promised. Git 'way back!"

"Now look here, Ben, this won't do. You let the capt'in go; we must hev him."

"We ain't safe ef he goes; we kain't do that. Ar' ye goin'? Ef ye be, all right; ef not, I push him off; an' I'll do it now ef Nat Summers don't put back the rifle he's tryin' to cock behind yer back."

The man, who had been concealed in the attempt to get a shot at Ben on the sly, relinquished the design with a surpish look.

"The darned pup sees ever' thing," growled Tommy Turtle. "Don't try that on ag'in' him. You can't fool the old man a cent's worth. What a man he would be ef we c'd git him to jine us. I wish we only could. Capt'in?"

"What do you want, Turtle?"

"What kin we do? Give us orders."

"You must go back, boys," said Conrad. "If you can think of some plan to get me out of the clutches of these fellows, do it."

"An' bear this in mind," said Ben: "the first time we hear an alarm, I mean to shoot him right through the head!"

"Good-by, capt'in," said Tommy. "We will try what we kin do."

As he spoke, the horse men began to file out of the pass. The present danger was over.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE TOILS.

THEY took the prisoner inside the barricade and bound him to a tree. Night came on, and such a night as they have in early winter in the prairie land—clear and cold, with a bright moon. He complained bitterly of the uncomfortable place they gave him, and they took him into the little brush-hut which had been built, and tying him again, allowed him to lie down. Jan was placed on guard, and Ben paced up and down by the barricade, waiting for an attack, which he thought they might make in the night. Jan sat down in the doorway of the hut, and laid his rifle across his knees. This strange fellow had come into the prairie country an ignorant man in the wiles of trapper and hunter life, but long companionship with Ben Miffin had made him equal to the best. But then, he was gifted by nature with a good quantity of native shrewdness, which it only needed training to bring out. Under the fostering care of Ben he had become a practiced shot, and his great strength made him a bad enemy to meet in deadly conflict.

He had one fault, which he could never quite get over. He slept easily and heavily. If he sat down he was in danger of falling asleep at any moment. Ben knew this failing and kept an eye on him always. But tonight, bound as the prisoner was, he could not escape, he thought. Had he not tied the knots himself? But the most active men are sometimes deceived, and Ben found this to his cost before morning.

The guard saw that Jan was likely to go to sleep, and suffered him to do so. Jan lay upon the ground not far from the prisoner, sleeping soundly. An hour dragged by, and Conrad raised his head. He knew by the heavy breathing of the Dutchman that his senses were locked in slumber. The prisoner's feet were not bound, and rising to a sitting posture, he bent his head, and seizing with his teeth the hilt of a

knife which protruded from his breast, he drew it from its sheath and dropped it over his shoulder within reach of his hands. Taking it in his left hand, holding the point up, he managed to insinuate the point into the knot which Ben had tied. The blade was a keen one and the buckskin parted with a slight noise. He fell back immediately, fearing that Jan would awake, but he did not. He lay there for ten minutes, although the knife had pierced him in the thigh as he fell backward and his blood was soaking into the ground as he lay.

Satisfied at length that all was safe, Conrad took off the kerchief and thrust it into his pocket. He had no time to staunch the wound. Opening the breast of his coat, from a secret pocket in the back he took out a small case, containing two small bottles. From the smallest of these he took the stopper, and poured a little of the contents upon a handkerchief. This done, the unmistakable odor of chloroform began to spread through the hut. Rising to his knees, he crept to the side of Jan, and waved the handkerchief to and fro before his nostrils for a while, without touching his face. When satisfied that the subtle drug had done its work sufficiently to prevent the easy awakening of the victim, he pressed the handkerchief lightly on his nostrils, and held it there for several moments. The work was done at last, and Jan lay helpless beneath his hand.

The eyes of the man began to gleam and he clutched his knife viciously. He would have liked to plunge it to the hilt in the bosom of the sleeping man. But, just as he half raised the knife, he heard the sound of coming feet. Cursing the comer heartily, he darted to his place and lay down in the same position as before, holding his hands behind him. The comer was Ben, who looked into the hut, and seeing the prisoner lying quietly on his back, concluded that he was asleep and did not disturb him. The great fear which haunted Conrad was that the old man would smell the chloroform and enter to find the cause. He clutched his knife firmly and if Ben had entered then his life would have been in danger. But, he remained at the door a moment, looking smilingly into the face of the sleeping Jan, and then went back to his post. The moment he was gone the prisoner crept

to the side of Dan who was sleeping close at hand and operated upon him in the same manner as upon Jan.

As far as these two were concerned he was free already. But, the old man outside was the man to be feared the most. He hurried to the side of the hut opposite the barricade, and cut out two heavy beams, leaving a passage large enough for him to emerge. He crept out cautiously.

Half an hour after Ben again looked into the hut. Jan had fallen over on his back and was sleeping heavily. Dan was also asleep. But the prisoner was gone!

With a shout of rage, Ben sprang in and shook Jan roughly. The effect of the drug had nearly passed, but it was some moments before he was fully awake. The tumult Jan made aroused Dan, who started up.

"What is this?" he cried. "The prisoner gone?"

"Thanks to this damned Dutchman," growled Ben. "I meant 'd know'd he'd go to sleep. Don't you smell something queer?"

"Chloroform!" cried Dan. "We have been drugged."

"Put to sleep?"

"Yes."

"Penn," said Jan, "don't tell me dat der mans gits away because I go to sleep. I no fer dinks. I vorks poety hard lately, and I poots sleep pafire I knows. Well, he gone. Cut off mine head and throw it out from der door. I no goot to nopoty now."

"Don't take it too hard, old man. Yer to blame, but ef the damned pup meant to drug ye, he'd 'a' done it anyhow. What puzzles me is, how he got out of the litch. I put him in. They must well call him 'Will o' the Wisp'."

"He is gone. We may look for an attack now, since he is safe."

"Hark to that," said Ben, raising his hand for silence. A tremendous storm, which filled the valley from end to end, was rising in the direction of the rebels' camp.

"It's just what I can now," said Ben. "Thar's whar he got out. He's took the back track, climbed the mountains, an' went down the path whar ye had the fight with him, to keep clear of this old man. Never mind. I'll hev him yit, before I go to grass."

"I hope you may. Let us prepare for an attack. We need another man here. Let Jan go back for Indian Joe."

Jan ran off, eager to atone for the evil he had unwittingly done, and came back directly with the half-breed. They had hardly reached the barricade when a horseman appeared in the gap. He went down at the crack of Ben Moffitt's rifle, while the stern old man began to reload his piece, without a smile or frown on his face.

"He brags it on his chest," said he. "They won't come up so brash after that."

He was right. Awed by the fate which had overtaken their companion, those who followed him pressed and drew together. In this position they took the fire of the other three rifles. All were good shots, and the foremost man paid dearly for being in the firing line. There was a backward movement, and at the same time Jeff Roper and the others came up on the run, eager to take part in the conflict.

"Why did you come?" demanded Dan. "You would have done better to stay at camp."

"We wanted a hand in the fun," said Jeff Roper. "There ain't a man here that ain't lost something, one time or another, by the hands of these same varmints. So don't drive us back; now don't."

"Stay, since you are here. Now, I will you and Jan to load the spare rifles for us. In that way we shall always keep two charges ready. When a man dies, give him another rifle. Get ready. They are gathering for a raid. Thank fortune, they can only come three at a time."

Coming on with wild shouts, the robbers were met by the determined rifles of the hunters, and again driven back with loss. Several wounded men lay groaning in the pass. There were slain on either side and a number of others had been killed to a considerable extent.

"They are gone," said Corral; "I should like to have that old man Moffitt in my back. He is a real terror. Tell Moffitt not to go beyond the range of those rifles."

The brave girl was there, rushing from one wounded man to another, giving them drink from a canteen she carried in her hand. As fast as they fell one of the men carried them to the shelter of the rocks and placed them in her hands.

Rough, bearded men, most of them ruffians and murderers, looked up in her face with a smile of thanks before they closed their eyes forever on the world. The combat was at its height. Shouts, cries of agony or rage, and terrible battle shouts, rang in her ears. She had been in scenes of battle before, but never in one where the dangers were as suddenly met as now.

She saw the tall form of Dan at times, reared above the front ranks as he made ready to die. His face, flushed with the ardor of battle, looked grand to her. She began to comprehend that she thought more of this man than she would care to show.

The ranks were crowding forward now, but were beaten back before the fatal riles of the hunters. Cornal whispered a low order in the ear of Jasper Vinton, and hurried away. From that time there was a lull in the battle for half an hour. A silence which had reigned for a few moments was suddenly broken by a terrific battle cry—a cry which made the woods ring. At the same moment a band of nearly two hundred Blackfeet, with Will of the Whip and Whirling Breeze at their head, *came down upon their rear!*

"Borne down by that vast multitude,

They found their graves where first they stood."

Attacked in front and rear, they stood bravely up to the work and fought with a determination worthy of a better fate. It was vain. Tom died upon an Indian spear; Joe was desperately wounded by a rifle ball; Jeff Rector lay wounded on the soil; Dan, though hurt in two places, still stood up.

But Jan and Ben, unarmed, holding their disabled rifles with shaking hands, stood helplessly, surrounded by Dan. The great body of the enemy closed in upon them, and Dan was borne to the earth. Cornal stood back with a dagger in his hand. That had been Dan Cornal's last moment of life, but that day came. The danger was over, and he had seen that the Blackfeet were off the hill, when Martha came and saved the hunter from the worst.

"This is a brave deed, Cornal Vinton! Have you sunk so low that you will slay a woman and man?"

He looked abashed.

"I was heated by the battle," he said, sulkily. "I am glad you came between."

"Listen to me, Conrad. If one of these prisoners is harmed through your means, be sure of this: you will never see my face again."

"I have nothing to say in the matter, I yield my own vote. How many are killed? Where are the Dutchman and Ben Mifflin?"

"Fighting yet," she said, looking up. "Oh, save that brave old man."

History can show no braver deed than this. An old man, past his sixtieth year, and an ignorant German, standing up alone before the attack of nearly three hundred men. To be sure, the assailants fought at great disadvantage on account of the narrow pass. Just as the girl cried out to save them, the two went down under the determined efforts of their assailants. Half a dozen tomahawks were levelled at them, but a lithe young warrior, with a brave and true and firm, darted in between them and their levelled weapons.

"Back, warriors of the Blackfoot! Back, sons of the pale-face! No harm must be done to such brave men as these. The Panther, son of Whirling Breeze, has said it, and he will keep his word. These prisoners are mine."

"Have your own way, Panther; we don't care for these two; they are in good hands," said Conrad. "Besides, they were taken by our red brothers. The rest of the prisoners are mine."

"It is well," said Whirling Breeze, the chief who led the Blackfeet. "My brother is just to the Indians."

They spent the rest of the day in collecting the traps and peltries scattered about. Jan and Ben looked on in silence, and noted that there was one cache which they had failed to find.

"It seems to me that there were more furs than this," said Conrad.

"You don't seem to remember that it's mighty early in the season, Mister man," said Ben. "We ain't trapped so much ez hunted. We was hired to hunt."

"True," said Conrad. "It is not so strange, after all. I want to make a proposition to you, Ben. You see how you are situated. It will be next to impossible for you to get away from Whirling Breeze, and the probability is he will

roast you. Now, you are too old a man, and too brave a one, to be finished in that way. I want two such men as you and your companion in my band. I give you the opportunity of joining us. Whirling Breeze will do any thing for me."

"What would I be called on to do?" asked Ben.

"A little of every thing—much the same kind of work you have seen us do. It is paid for. In less than two years, if you are sewing, you will have enough to make you comfortable. What do you say?"

"I say that you are a dirty heathen, and if I wa'n't a pris'ner I'd beat ye right in the street for sayin' that to me. I jine a lot of thieves and murderers that ain't fit to live on the face of the earth. I make one of such a gang! Now, look yer: I've been a man all my life that tried to live my life out fair and square. I'm a free trapper. I've made the broad prairies my home, and no man ever came to me and said sech a thing about me. Get out! I don't want to look at ye. Ye ain't fit to live."

Conrad left him in a rage, and went out to the other side of the camp. There he saw a sight which nearly drove him mad. Dan had been so wounded as to be unable to walk, and was sitting under a tree; and near him, seated on a great stone, was Matt Martin. The eyes of Vesey dilated, and shot forth flames of fire. He made a few rapid strides and seized her by the shoulder.

"What do you mean, girl? Was it not enough that you followed him up and down with your accursed warnings and prophecies of danger, but must you play nurse to him in my camp? Away with you!"—

"Take your hand from my shoulder, Conrad," she said, calmly.

He removed his hand.

"Go away at once, Martin; you know not what you do. I will take care that you shall never see me again. It will take but little more time to make me a man of whom even I should be proud."

"I cannot go away. I will take care of this prisoner, and see that he comes to no harm. A woman, guided by a sense of wrong, can do much, Conrad. My gratitude for your kindness is not being buried under the malignities you heap upon me."

"Will you come with me? I wish to talk with you," he said.

"Certainly. Any duty you can claim of me which a brother might have, I am ready to grant."

He led her apart from Dan, who had been looking with indignation during the interview.

"You think me harsh," said Veezy, as they stood alone. "I do not design to be so. You know my nature, dear girl. When I love, it is with a power passing the love of women; and it is for your good I seek to separate you from this young man. What do you know of him?"

The new line of tactics rather disconcerted her. She was compelled to say that she knew nothing of Dan but what she had seen of him for the last three weeks.

"And is it just in you, Marian, to throw aside the passion of years for the love of one who may not care for you?"

"You assume too much, Conrad, when you say I would show love for one who made no return."

"Does it not show love to follow him from camp to camp; to warn him of danger at every opportunity, to send for a ring from him?"

"Oh, Conrad!"

"Silence. You sent for his ring. You know it."

"I did, Conrad, but—"

"You wear it still," he persisted.

"When I used that sentence to get something from him for a keepsake, I believed honestly that I should never see his face again. I acknowledge that I care for him more than any other man, for he has saved my life."

"And did not I?"

"I have tried to repay you for that," she said. "I give you my confidence."

"Away with it. What do I care for that? I have had enough nonsense. Now listen to me. I have not wasted all these years for you, to be looked at this stage of the game, nor will I be. Look to yours. Mine you shall be, by fair means or foul."

"You begin to show your true colors, Conrad Veezy. I will never be your wife."

"You shall, by heaven."

"We shall see. Not while I have strength to kill myself, or you. Beware of me. You have trained me up in your way of life, and we shall see whether or no I will do justice to your teachings."

"Do you think I fear you, girl? I am determined to make you mine. For the present, I leave you. But it will not be for long."

He walked hastily away. Directly after a man rose from the shelter of the rocks behind which he had been lying and walked toward her. It was the lieutenant of Vesey, Jasper Verton. She heard his step and turned. There was a look upon his face which she did not like.

"And how is Maid Marian to-day?" he said. "We have done our work well here in the Black Hills."

"Too well, Jasper Verton. I am sorry for it," she said.

"Oh, their time had come. You remember the old saw, 'What will be, will be.' It was their fate to fall here, as it may be ours to die here or in another place. Can you spare me a moment of your company? I have something to say to you."

"Say on."

"You are short with me. To be plain, I have overheard your conversation with my worthy captain."

"Ah!"

"You are startled."

"So you are one of the kind to lie hid under the rocks and listen to a private conversation. I thought better of you than that."

"No doubt. We will not say in what manner I happened to overhear your conversation. It is enough for me that I did overhear it, and I now tell you of it. I see you have no great objection for the captain. I am glad of that. Now, I wish to be your friend, Miss Marian."

"I am willing to be friends. But your manner of obtaining information is not creditable. I assure you."

"Perhaps not. I wanted to say to you that if I can be of service to you I will be ready. If you ask so much of me as to put your life in my hands, I will do it."

"Who do you mean?"

"Vesey, 'Will o' the Wisp,' Markman, or what you

will. If you want him put out of the way, I am the man to do it."

"Put out of the way!" she said, bewildered. "What do you mean?"

"Put to sleep; sent down below; killed, in point of fact," said he, coolly. "The fellow has gone to the length of his rope. Rather put him out of sight, than leave him here, an eyesore to you."

"Wretch!" she cried. "Do you come here with such a cold-blooded proposition as that? For what do you take me, *risa*? Not only do I spurn your infamous proposition, but I think it no more than just to denounce you to Conrad."

"You would not do that, surely?" he muttered, turning pale. "I meant it for your good."

"How low I must have sunk in the eyes of all, if such a proposition as this can be made to me for my good! The proposition to kill the man who has reared me, whom he might have left me to perish. If I had a weapon in my hand, I do not think you would live to insult another by such an offer."

"I beg your pardon," he said, humbly. "I was betrayed to this through too great zeal to do you service. I hope this may not be used to my discredit."

"Not if you truly repent."

"I do indeed. I was mad, Marion. I love you. The ground you tread is sacred to me. Let me tell you now I love you."

"Silence! Do not go on. It seems to me that all the men in this camp are going mad together."

"May I not even tell my love?"

"It is hopeless."

The man stood with bent head, so that she could not see the savage flash of his eyes. In this position he remained for a moment, and then looked up. There was not a trace of passion in his white face.

"That dream is over," he said. "You will stand beside me, I hope."

She did so, glad that he took it so easily. But she was mistaken. In that moment she had made an enemy more fierce than even Conrad Vesey could be, for, though he hated

all who loved her, at least he never hated her. But Verton, who was of a vindictive nature, would have been glad to see her lying dead at his feet. He went away, and drew Conrad aside with a horrified face.

"I am afraid to speak it, Conrad. But, there is something you ought to know."

"Do not fear. Out with it, man."

"You will not be angry with me?" he said.

"No. Go on."

"A few moments ago I met Marian among the rocks yonder. She was very angry at something; that I could see in her face as I came up.

"Have you a mind to do me a service, Verton?" she said.

"Of course I told her yes.

"I will teach Conrad Vesey that I have some power in this camp," she said. "I told him so before, and he shall know it. Do you care for me enough to put him under the sod?"

"Stop!" thundered Vesey. "Who said that?"

"Marian Delisle."

"You must think me a fool, to come to me with a story like that," said Vesey.

"Then go your own way, Conrad Vesey. I thought to do you a service, but it seems you do not care for such."

"But what is this you impute to Marian Delisle? It is terrible. I would believe you, for you have always been true to me; but Marian never liked you. Verton, will you swear by the holy saints that this is true?"

Verton readily took the oath. He would have sworn to any thing then, in his hate of Marian.

"And so she is as far gone as that," muttered Conrad. "I love her, God knows how much. I doubt if this fellow whom she loves cares a pin's weight whether she lives or dies. I will punish her. Conrad Vesey will be true to himself. Verton?"

"My captain?"

"Will you be true to me in this business of mine? I must do something to repay this cruel girl in kind. Will you stand by me?"

"Through blood and fire. She will deny it, of course," said Verton.

"I shall not accuse her, I think. Let it work itself out. I am not myself to-day. My head is in a whirl. I think we will begin upon these two hunters. It would be a fine thing to burn them before her."

"It would be better to burn the wounded fellow, Crowley. And perhaps this Jeff Rooter."

"His time will come. The two hunters are together in yonder hut, I think?"

"Yes."

"Ben Maffin refused to join us yesterday. Perhaps he will like it better at the stake."

With these words he turned back toward the hut in which Ben was confined.

CHAPTER X.

IN FOR IT!

BEN was half lying on the floor of the rude hut. He was not alone, for beside Jan, who sat near him, there stood the young warrior who had saved his life in yesterday's battle. The young chief was speaking.

"My father has done wrong," said the Panther. "Why did he not listen to the voice of the White Spirit, and go away?"

"We were going pretty soon," said Ben. "I'm right sorry we waited so long."

"The eyes and ears of the Blackfeet are always open. They heard the call of their friends from afar and came. What more, you say, you saved my life. The Panther can not forget."

"I remember it. 'Twas at that time when John Devereil was here."

"The Double Tongue! Whirling Bronze is just. He will do what is right, and he will not be too hard upon the man who saved his son. But, he can not do a wrong to the great nation."

"My son speaks well," said Ben. "I am a withered pine

It matters not how soon I fall to the ground, an' am seen no more. When do we leave this place?"

"The Doctor will go to-morrow. Good-by. Panther will see you again."

The young chief walked away. Ben crawled to the door and looked into the Indian camp. He saw that it was really a feasting party, but the hunters of the Blackfeet are only feasting on the chance of plunder. A number of women were in the camp, busy here and there, laughing and talking. Ben looked at them in considerable astonishment.

"I never saw such venuses in all my life," whispered Jan. "Dey make me wish den a winnall. Of dey wash an' of dem make I would make 'em salt cop."

"Ye didn't stop on I-jen weema's tongue nohow," said Ben. "Now that was my wife. I've seen women before now that could talk, but, whow! Her tongue run like the machinery of a fast-moving engine in a quartz mill. 'Twa'n't very pleasant neither. I couldn't stand it, myself."

"I don't know dat kind of voodoos," said Jan. "Dey no goot."

"I've got the thought," said Ben, "that my wife 'ud turn up
after some time and go for me. I've been afraid of it a long
time. I guess I'm pretty safe now."

— Vy?..

"I think they'll probably reach us in the morning. I kin see them in their eyes, every man of 'em."

"Now, listen, Papa, don't!" I can't stand such dark ash
and gloom, don't be vexed. Yet you means by talking dat
way all de times? About a mass? I never hears such things
yet I live. So don't you say dat no more!"

[illegible]

"Nonsense! I don't care," said Mamma; "I won't stand any more
of your nonsense. You are quite right, and I won't be talked
out of my sense by you. Don't refer to me as anybody. Don't
talk all dalk."

"How yer own way; hev yer own way. It don't make no difference. Ye'll make just ez good a fry. An' talkin'

of that, I sh'd think they'd be willing to let me and my men here some'er's to build the fires. I judge it's their best bet to hev it ready an' not waste time."

"Vell, off I vash not t'el mit my hands and feet I vould smash you right square mit der mallet. Dat ish vat I vould do."

"No ye woul'n't, Dutchy," said Ben. "No ye woul'n't. It's lucky for ye that I'm tired, or I would smash ye. Yes I would. Yes indeedly. Take care what ye say."

Nothing could quell the passionate spirit of the trapper. His eyes roamed over the grim faces of the Indians as if desirous of finding one to whom a fight would be a pleasure. No doubt he could be accommodated in short order if required, but no time was given to get up the quarrel. The two men were hurried into a lodge again and left there. Half an hour after the lodge-curtain was lifted and Conrad Vespy appeared. He had thrown away his cap and worn instead a feather head-dress, after the manner of a Delaware chief. Ben sat upon the ground with his back against the lodge-pole, looking defiance at the intruder. He turned his eyes and looked down on the two prisoners with an expression of intelligent pleasure. Neither of the prisoners spoke a word.

"Good-day, my very good friends," said Ben.

"Now see yer," said Ben. "We don't want anythin' to say to you, Conrad Vespy. You better go. You dare not come to say what you did this mornin'. My hands are tired now, but ez sure ez ye try that on, just so sure I take ye by the throat an' choke the life out of ye, when I get loose."

"Seem trel. Do you threaten me? You do not know my power here."

"Yes I do. Ye kin have no reason at the state of ye like. I know that right well. But what does it matter? A man can only die once."

"I came to say to you that it is best for you to prepare for the torture. Put no trust in the Prophet. He would help you if he could, but his power is only limited that all. You must burn."

"Let it come," said Ben, steadily. "I have looked on death afore."

"You are right. And to-day you shall look on it for the last time. Maid Marian shall stand by and see you die."

"You scoundrel! You have lived the life of a wolf, and like a wolf you will die. I do not fear you. If I must die, there ain't a man in the Black Hills more ready. Ez fer you, I've got a word to say."

"Say on."

"You are doin' this for the love of a woman. Yer a fool. That ain't the way to win a girl like Marian. Let her come; let her see my death, and she will go away hating you like death. I think she begins to hate you now."

"Silence!" shouted Vasey, "or I will cut you down where you stand."

"I won't be silent," said Ben.

Vasey drew a knife and rushed at the speaker. At this moment the Panther darted in and struck him down with a hatchet.

"Dog!" he shouted. "A Blackfoot woman would not strike a prisoner unless at the torture. What do you here?"

"Good blow!" said Ben. "Hit him ag'in. Now I've got the chance I mean to give him a piece of my mind. He's a low-lived, sneaking purp. He ain't got no heart. A rattlesnake has more. I'll go my bottom dollar he kin squirm like a snake."

Cornel sprang up. There was a red mark on his head from which the blood was trickling slowly to the ground. He took out a piece of cloth from his pocket and bound it about the wound. The blood soon changed the color of the cloth completely. He wiped it from time to time with his fingers and they became stained by the flowing tide. A more horrible picture is seldom seen. He stole out of the lodge like a bloody specter, leaving the Panther alone with the prisoners.

"Be of good heart," he said. "My father loves me and will do much for me. I will save you if I can."

While these words he left the hut and for a few moments not a sound was heard. Suddenly after they were taken from the hut and again tied to trees. Ben was glancing quickly from side to side, when he heard a shrill cry and felt a pair of bony hands seize him. He turned with an exclamation of

surprise which changed to horror as he saw who it was. A middle-aged Indian woman, with a hooked nose, keen black eyes, and a shrill voice, was the person who had claimed his attention.

It was no other than his much-feared and long-neglected Indian spouse, the Green Snake!

Ben emitted one long, shrill whistle of astonishment as he recognized her and struggled to free his arms from her grasp. But she had lost her white chief too long to yield him his life.

"Gone long time, Strong Buffalo! Come back now. Glad to see you. Heart very sad dis long time. Weep rivers of water."

"Damn my buttons ef it ain't the Green Snake!" cried poor Ben. "Git out. What d'ye hang to me for? I guess I've been away from ye long enough far ye to git another husband, ain't I?"

"No husband come," replied the Green Snake. "'Fraid to take away squaw of Strong Buffalo. He good chief. Love his squaw. Come back, find 'nother brave got her, but 'nother brave. 'Nother brave no want. Git plenty wife he own. Let Green Snake be."

"I wish the Lord they hadn't been so darned superstitious about it," said Ben. "Come. Don't be so bloody affectionate. I ain't used to it. Git out. Whinnies don't hang on to warriors at the stake."

"No burn. Green Snake go to Whirling Breeze. Big husband's life. Never let him go til he say he no burn."

"Don't do it," said Ben. "By jinks, I'd just as live burn ez not. 'Tain't much when you get used to it. Damn it now. It's fun; crack fun. A little fire an' a good deal of water go a great ways."

"No burn, tell you," persisted the Green Snake. "Save you, self. Go now to Whirling Breeze."

Ben hesitated. Death itself was preferable to again subjecting the Green Snake to get him in her clutches, but might not that make use of her in getting him? He thought it over and told her to go away for the present and return to him in a half-hour. Green Snake came promptly at the time.

"How ken ye hear?" demanded Ben. "When I tell the Crows ye were thar, all right."

"We went out on a hunting party. Whirling Breeze killed all the braves and took us prisoners. I am a Blackfoot now. I hate the Crows. I love the Blackfoot. But husband no come till now."

"I'm in a pooty fix," muttered Ben, fairly sweating with agony. "Ef she gits me, I'm a ruined man forever. I must git clear of her somehow. An' at the same time— Green Snake?"

"Yes, Strong Buffalo. My ears are open."

"An' yer mouth too, most of the time," grumbled Ben. "Anyhow, come hyar. I want ye to go to Whirling Breeze an' claim me. Don't let up on him."

Green Snake started to go.

"Hold on," said Ben. "Wait a jiff. Let me run the matter over. I want to think ef I've got any chance to git away after I've done the deed. I don't perpose to stay hyar with her, ef I kin git away. But I'm afraid I'm a goner. 'Tisn't much to git burnt. I believe I'll risk it."

"Dink off me, Penn," said Jan.

"Hold on!" said Ben. "I've got it. Say, Green Snake. Ye never released me natch anyway. What would ye think of thet thar chap fer a husband?"

"Big brave," said Green Snake, nodding approvingly. "Good!"

"Maybe ye'd jost ez li've change. Take Jan an' let them do what they durn please with me."

"Dat ain't fair!" shouted Jan, in mortal terror. "I neder likes dat so long ash I lits. I not likes Injun voomans. Dake her yourself."

"Don't be so bashful, Jan. Don't allow yer feelin' ag'in' a friend of a good thing to influence ye. Think of the snake an' the fire, the arrows an' bullets, an' take this blashin' snake to yer buzzum—-an' ef ye don't wish ye'd got a red-hot stove insid, I lose my guess—oh, git out! Don't *think* no. It's all right. Take her, my boy, an' take my blessin' with her."

"I neder dakes no sooch voomans, I dinks I'd yoost as li've be ash do dat. No, dake her away. Vat! Didn't I deli Karine Schooner ash I voald marry her ven I cooms pack from her vest?"

"That don't make any difference. Marry Katrine when ye go back. Mebbe the Green Snake will let ye go. Mebbe she won't. I judge it's more the last than the first."

"What I do?" said Green Snake. "Mebbe I'll husband somehow. If one, all right. If other, jess as good. All same."

This accommodating proposition did not find favor in the eyes of Jan, who shrunk from her approach.

"It's to save yer life," said Ben.

"I don't cares nothings 'bout it. I don't want to save it. I ven't haf her," shouted Jan.

"Ye hear him, Green Snake. Then go an' claim her. I s'pose I've got to do it."

The woman dared away, and shortly after they heard her assailing Whirling Breeze with all sorts of clamorous demands for the surrender of her husband. It may as well be known that the Green Snake was a sort of captain in the Blackfoot village. They had taken her and did not know what to do with her. None of the braves wanted her for a wife on account of her bitter tongue, which no personal danger could deter her from using freely on all occasions. The arguments she advanced were conclusive to the Indian mind. Ben was her husband. There was no one to keep the balance straight. Let him go free and there would be no other hold in the village.

Whirling Breeze took her by the hand and led her to the tree to which the prisoners were bound, back to back.

"Wife?" said Whirling Breeze in a questioning tone, pointing at the Green Snake. Ben hesitated a moment, fearing to commit himself, and finally said "yes" in a very doubtful tone of voice.

"Husband?" said the chief, pointing to Ben.

"Yes," said the Green Snake, promptly.

Whirling Breeze cut the cords which bound them to the tree and thus addressed him: "Ye are now a Blackfoot. While ye remain with us and do not attempt to escape, it is well. When ye try to escape ye are sure to be caught, and we will kill you."

"What ar' ye goin' to do with my friend?" said Ben.

"Big man, eh?"

"Yes."

"Let him be Blackfoot too, if he will. It is better than killing. My son loves the Strong Buffalo well, and he hates Corral. Let Strong Buffalo beware of him."

"I'll do that," said Ben. "Let my friend go."

The chief cut the cords which bound the Dutchman, and he was at liberty. Corral saw the action with anger, but just then it was not his cue to interfere. He had not even attempted to avenge the blow the Panther had dealt him. That revenge was allowed to sleep for the present.

Ben was standing by himself, and Green Snake, at a little distance, endeavored to attract his attention. He paid no attention to the telegraphic signs she used, and she came near and sneezed in his ear. He jumped as if stung by a snake.

"Oh, I forgot. What the devil do you want?"

"Abuse! Runaway," she screamed. "I was the daughter of a Crow chief. Warriors fought for my hand. And I, who might have been the squaw of Big Head, chief of a Crow village, became your squaw. You are a coward!"

"Oh, shut up," said Ben. "Ain't it enough that I allow ye are my wife, but ye must holler it to every one in camp? Git out!"

"Oh, snake in the grass!" yelled the irate female. "Dog of a white-face! The medicine-man put charms in your bones. You will cry like a little child. Bah! I spit at you."

"Don't go on so, Snakey. 'Tain't no use, I tell ye," said Ben.

"And where is there a wretched woman who has a husb'nd who does not love her? Leave me, before I tear the eyes out from your head, and throw them to the dogs."

"I know'd it," said Ben. "I know'd I couldn't stand this sort. I ought to have tried to turn over, for givin' up a good thing when I had it. Ben's wife would only last a little while, an' ye kin't let a cow on that. What if I should hev to stay with her a month! I'll be a dead man long afore that time. Anyway, that's a chance. They'll let me go out on a half the hunt now, and there's the chance of gittin' stung to death. That's a good way. I'll try that, ef she gits too hard on me."

"Ah, wretched one that I am!" said the Green Snake.

"Oh, sad tale! . . . The husband in whose lodge I must sit and make the fire burn, cares not for me! He looks at my cries, he sees my tears, and he laughs! He is cruel as death! He hates me!" Then changing her tone suddenly: "I will turn out the eyes of the man who has married the daughter of a Crow chief. Let me show you that I have the heart of a brave in my bosom."

And if Ben had not departed in hot haste, there is reason to believe she would have been as good as her word. As it was, she attacked poor Jan, who could not get out of her way, and pulled out a double handful of hair.

"Ah-ha! wretch! companion of the miserable man who does not love his wife!"

"Git out!" shouted Jan. "Vat ter tryv I ye mean? I am not your husband. Dat ish him vat ish married you. So help me ash I would not marry you off yu vas worth a hundred million tollars in money."

She made another dash at his hair, and Jan fled incessantly, following his companion. Two or three young Indian women, who saw the fracas, laughed heartily and showed their white teeth. Jan overtook Ben near the center of the camp, out of breath.

"I'd goot ash soon fight another crazy pair ash be marry dat vooman," said he. "Have I got any hair left to pull off mine heat?"

"Never mind, Jan; bear it today, and tomorrow may see us some other day. I've gotten it. They'll make us pretty close, but not so close as if we were farther apart. If we get to the edge, I'll save Dat Crow by a hair's breadth."

"I don't any thing to get away from you, but I don't want to pull your hair. And to say dat I do not know Ben?"

"I don't know you," Dan Crowley began, looking at the other man. He had immediately recognized the owner of the hair, and was ready to give chase, but on the spot he was obliged to restrain himself. In the midst of the scene, he was attracted by something which passed between the women. He would have followed on, but that a voice which he did not know called him back. He understood it then; it was the old woman. "Git out!" she whispered. Dan rose and followed her without a word. They passed stealthily through the numerous groups of rollers,

picking their way carefully without a sound. Ben took the lead, Jan came next, and Dan brought up the rear.

Ben knew the ground well, but that did not prevent meeting a guard. A leveled rifle met them, and a voice cried out to halt. There was no time to dally, and Ben knocked the rifle man down without scruple. Then, taking the hand of Dan in his, he hurried on until they were fairly on the mountain side.

"Take your ease now," said Ben. "They ain't fools enough to foller us hyar."

"What do you propose to do? I must ask the question, for I will never leave this region until I have seen Marian again."

"Trust me," said Ben. "Ef I ain't mistaken, to-morrow night the Prairie Rangers will be swept from the earth. Foller me."

CHAPTER XI.

A THUNDERBOLT AND A CALM.

A TERRIBLE confusion reigned in the camp of the robbers. The man who had been knocked down staggered to his feet, yelling like a madman. The whole band, Indian and white, mingled, and cried out in rage. The Indians were especially angry, what words can tell the tale of the Green Snake, when she found that her pet's blood should be again given her the slip? Counsel sought out Whittier Brooks, with eyes full of rage.

"Chief, see the end of the foolishness which induced you to trust that old fox, Ben Miller. You asked him even a promise from him that he would not attempt to escape; and you see the result."

"My brother does not like what I have done," said the Whittier Brooks. "How can he better it? His own power is gone."

"Let Will of the Whip speak to a man who fears him not," said the Panther. "If our prisoners have escaped, is it any thing to him? Let him look to his own."

"You crow well, you old chicken," said Counsel, looking at the young chief with a merry brow. "If I do not eat your

comb within a week, say that my knife is dull. I do not forget a blow."

"We will stay here no longer than the morning," said Whirling Breeze. "My brother is angry at those who are lords of the prairie. If he wants the help of the Blackfeet, let him come to them."

At early morning the chief gathered his band, took his share of the spoils, and rode away. Conrad was not ill-pleased to see him go. He had a pain in his head which the chief might have interfered with. The moment he was gone, he called to one of his desperadoes, a small, lean old man, evidently a Spaniard.

"Gaspard," he said, "take my horse and ride for your life. Find the priest, Father Sala—you know where he is likely to be at this time. Bid him mount, and come to me without a moment's delay. Take a hot horse with you, in case he should not have one; choose the best. Away! and see that you are back by four o'clock."

The man knew his master too well to hesitate. In five minutes he was speeding out of the pass, leading a horse by the bridle. The leader smiled, and turned toward the door of the little *marquise* which was always carried with the band for the use of Maid Marian. She stood in the doorway. He laid his hand lightly on her arm, and led her into the *marquise*."

"So your lover is gone," he said. "It seems that he cared little for you, since he deserted you."

"Better I never looked upon his face again, than that he should remain in your hands," she said.

"You are bold," he replied. "Then you do not deny that you love the fellow."

"No; why should I deny it, even to you? He is at least a gentleman."

"It seems hard to me that Maria D'Este should sink so low as to love unchastely," he sneered. "He never told you that he loved you."

"That is false."

"When?"

"While I tended him, wounded."

"Ha! events march rapidly, then. I see that I must be

hasty to secure my bride. Marian Delisle, you are fallen low, even in my esteem. I will marry you, not because I love you as I did, but in pursuance of a vow. You conspired with Jasper Verton to take my life."

"I?"

"You! Do not deny it. He took an oath by all the holy saints that you proposed to him my murder—to 'put me under the sod'—those were the words. Oh, Marian, I loved you dearly, but man as I am. But you shall be mine, and when we are married I will humble your proud head as low in the dust as you would have laid mine."

"Stop! You say that Jasper Verton swore that I proposed your murder."

"He swore it on the holy saints."

"Dare you set him before my face?"

"I dare."

"Then let it be done. From this, in deed, I will clear myself, whatever may be my after fate."

"I will call him."

He went to the door and called Verton. He came in with a locking step, and his hand in the bosom of his coat. He looked at the ground, for he dared not face the eyes of Marian.

"Jasper Verton," she said, "look at me."

"What do you want?" he said, without raising his head.

"I can hear you."

"I am accused of a hideous crime of which you know I am not guilty. Dare you face me and say that lie is true?"

"I dare."

"Then look me in the face and say it. If you do, I will marry this man without a murmur."

If she had stalked for years for a test which he could not bear, she could never have chosen a stronger one. If she had asked him to swear upon the Bible that his story was true, he would have done it. If she had uttered the most horrible imprecations on his head if he spoke false, he would have uttered the oath. But, to say the words which would bind her to another! He could not do it. He remained with bowed head, and that stealthy hand still in the bosom of his coat.

"What means this?" cried Conrad; "have you lied to me Verton?"

"He proposed the murder himself, and said he loved me," cried Marian.

"Another?" cried Conrad. "Fool! Take your breath!"

The hand of Norton sprang from his bosom at the word and two pistols were leveled. Conrad's aim was true, and Jasper Norton, shot through the back, bounded into the air and fell dead. Marian ran to his head, but he was gone.

"I am sorry I spoke. Oh, Conrad, what have you done?"

"I have killed a vile traitor. Touch him not. I am glad you are absolved from this stigma, my darling. I am your lover again. But, having sent for the priest, the marriage shall go on."

"It shall not," she said.

"It shall."

She laid a hand upon the forehead of the dead man.

"I swear by the blood you have shed so unrighteously, that I will die sooner than be your wife, Conrad Vandy."

"Then my purpose must be carried out. I have sent for Father Sala. You know him well enough to be sure that no protestations on your part will move him in any way. He will marry us, be assured. Ho, there; come in, some of you."

Several of the men who had heard the pistols and come to the door, but had not dared to enter, obeyed the summons.

"What has he done?" asked one.

"He attempted my life, and is a traitor to the band," said Conrad. "I will prove it in the next council. Take him out and bury him. Whatever wealth he possessed will be divided."

The men took up the body and carried it out.

"Be ready at four o'clock. At that time you will be married," the brigand chief said, and dismissed the men. Clinging the band together, he told them to remain for their old camp at that time. He appointed a new lieutenant, in the place of Norton, and sat down to wait for the coming of Gaspard and the priest. They were on hand half an hour before the time, and came at once to the captain. The priest was a tall, savage-looking fellow, with a sunken face. He greeted Conrad with a light laugh, in becoming his priestly office.

"I can not speak to you now, Father Sala. I must get the men in motion. Gaspard, go to Lieutenant Tertie, and tell him to march at once."

The freebooters rode into the defile and were seen no more. At the same time the leader turned into the *marquée*, followed by the priest and Gaspard. Marian rose at their entrance, pale as death.

"You do not mean to carry out your hideous threat?" she said.

"I mean to marry you. That is enough for me."

"Do not so desecrate your priestly office, Father Sala. I do not wish to marry him. Surely you will not be a party to this business."

"You are angry now," said the priest. "And you are foolish. I am under the orders of Captain Vesey."

Conrad seized her hand. "Go on with the ceremony, priest."

In that desperate moment, she snatched a knife from his belt and struck at him. But Heaven preserved her from that crime. The point of the weapon struck the hilt of his breast-plate and glanced off. Before she could repeat the blow he had her in his arms, pinioning her hands to her sides.

"Now, Sala. Go on. I will hold her."

She was crying out in frantic appeals for mercy, when the roll of drums in the valley below broke upon their ears. It was followed by another volley, and then succeeded the sound of a general combat. Conrad released the girl and darted from the room. In a moment he was in the saddle and dashing down the path. As he came into the open plain he encountered all. The "Trapping Brigade" had been met by Ben Mullin and was now engaged in combat with his men. He saw that his bullets were wasted, and flying in every direction, and that Dan, McKim, Jim and three other horsemen had separated themselves from the rest and were coming down the mountain at a gallop. He turned back, and reached the spot where Marian stood.

"Run for your life, Sala. Up the mountain. You know the pass well. The 'Trapping Brigade' has come and my men are scattered to the four winds."

He leaped from the saddle and caught Marian in his arms. She struggled, but she was powerless in his grasp. Just as he began the ascent, the three fellows came into the pass and saw him. Leaping from their saddles, they gave chase. None

of them dared to fire, for fear they might injure Moll Marian. Ben did not run so fast as the others and kept his rifle ready. The pursued reached a place so steep that he was forced to put Marian up first. Before he had taken a step to follow, a rifle cracked. Conrad Vesey threw up his hands, and uttering a terrible cry, fell into the cañon by the side of which he had pursued his flight. The stream below received his body, and bore it away.

"I told him so," muttered Ben. "His bullet was run long ago, an' now he's got it."

They found Marian panting on the rock above. Dan lifted her tenderly and carried her down to the camp. The conflict in the valley was over and the Prairie Rangers existed only in name. The Trapping Brigade had fully reversed the slaughter of many an innocent.

They released Jeff Roster and Indian Joe, who had been placed upon mules, though wounded. They were well cared for. In a few days Dan set out on his return. It is always easy, in a trapping brigade, to find members who are sick of the life before it is fairly commenced, and seven men besides Jan and Ben rode back with them to the forts, upon the promise of a large sum of money from Dan. Jeff Roster received payment for what he had done, and remained with the brigade. Joe did the same.

Ben Milfin went on to St. Louis. Dan waited long enough to have a suitable outfit made for Marian, and they were married. He had no one to interfere in his choice of a wife. A few friends were witnesses of the union. Dan stood near the door welcoming Jan from time to time, to ask if "Moll Marian wa'n't a stunner." And Jan would answer, "Yaw."

That night the two got gloriously drunk in the bar saloon of "Yawwab Post," one of Jan's old haunts. In a day or two the hunters worried of the city, and with a general good-by to their friends went back to the Black Hills.

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